

THE IMMUTABLE LAW

BY LAURA COOKE BARKER



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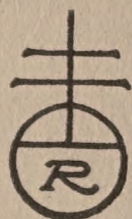
Who are these that are clad in
bright array?
These are they who have come
out of great tribulation.



✓
THE
IMMUTABLE
LAW

BY

LAURA COOKE BARKER ✓



THE ROYCROFTERS
EAST AURORA, N. Y.

1921

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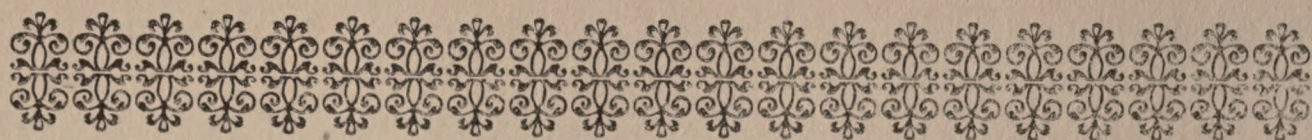
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no. 2

IN UNDYING REMEMBRANCE
OF MY WELL BELOVED
HUSBAND
FRANKLIN SYDNOR BARKER
BORN IN SPIRIT
TO HIS
INHERITANCE OF ECSTASY ETERNAL
ON APRIL THIRD
1920



*“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;
there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor
crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for
the former things are passed away, and he that
overcometh shall inherit all things.”*



The Immutable Law

CHAPTER I

IT was a sullen November afternoon. ¶ The rain beat against the windows in fitful gusts, and the few who ventured out on foot splashed through mud puddles in bedraggled disgust.

Inside, the fire chattered to itself in endless content; the tea kettle hummed its own cheery little tune, and a dark haired woman sat gazing out into the gloom, unmindful of the cosy duet going on, and apparently equally as unconscious of the fixed regard of the man at her side.

A coal, falling from the fire, broke the silence and brought a frown to her forehead; "I was having a day dream, and that wretched little rasping noise startled me back into life—I'm deadly sick of life!"

¶ "Does that include me —I am part of life!"

A gleam of amusement brightened her face—"I thought you considered yourself a heavenly body!"

He smiled. He wore no moustache, and his mouth was loose and expressionless—"You're always jibing a fellow."

She shrugged, and drawing the tea table nearer poured him a cup of the fragrant beverage; "Tell me the news," she said.

"News?" he reiterated, visibly brightening, as tho on familiar ground. "Why, hadn't you heard? Mrs. Duff has run away from her husband—or at least she has *gone*, and every one feels sure she has *eloped*." ❧ ❧

"That is scandal," she protested. "I asked for *news*."

"Well, what would you have? All the world is talking of it!"

She leaned back among the heaped up pillows of the couch with a little sigh, the faint touch of disdain deepening as she listened to his gossip. She was not a beautiful woman, her features were too strongly marked for the softly feminine loveliness attributed to beauty in womankind, but her hazel brown eyes held a magnetism not to be resisted, and the nobly shaped head, and broad brow, attracted to her more admiration than mere beauty could have received. To find a woman of such a type so lapped in idle luxury seemed an incongruous freak of fate, and she herself, dimly conscious of this, rebelled against the daily round of empty chat and laughter.

"You are not paying the slightest attention to what I am saying—I think the least a woman can do is to *listen* to a man when he asks her to marry him!" ¶ "But you have done it so often!" she sighed.

He bit his lip—"What if I have—that only proves how desperately in earnest I am!"

She sat, regarding him reflectively. "A man's love is but the reflection of his own image in the mirror of his desires, and yet, really, I do believe he believes in it *himself*!"

Algy Dumont sprang to his feet; "You are actually insulting—every man says so—you regard every offer a chap makes as tho it were a joke!"

A shadow fell over her. "That is my only protection—to pretend I think it is all a joke! What else is left for a woman to do when she knows she is only desired because of her fortune—not for herself?"

¶ He flushed uncomfortably—"You know it is not so with me—I adore you—I would be your slave!"

She rose abruptly, tumbling the pillows to the floor. "A slave! What woman wants to marry a serf? *I* want a *master*! I could suffer—*die*—for a man who was *stronger* than I, even though I knew he was unworthy!"

¶ Algy gazed, uncomprehendingly, not knowing what to do with this unusual burst of impetuous confidence but, realizing that he had received another refusal to his suit, he turned toward the door, in crestfallen discomfiture, and made his way out in silence.

Left alone, Beatrice Vandee flung herself down upon the couch in an abandonment of discontent. "Shall I ever have the happiness, that other women know, of being loved because I am *I*—just for *that*, and *no other* reason? Even the poor I benefit care for me only because of what I *give*—not for *me*—never for myself! O, for just a little real love—I am so lonely—so alone!"

Yearningly she stretched out her arms as if to embrace some longed for vision, then let them fall with the hopelessness of emptiness, and ever unfulfilled desire. Wearily she lay among the cushions, staring down the years to the distant image of her mother, the vague memory of whom was like the exquisite perfume of summer roses recalled by one freezing amid winter snows.

She had been only a small child when that sweet presence had been taken out of her life, leaving her alone in a world suddenly grown too big, and too cold.

Her father, absorbed in the amassing of wealth, had not had time to notice her, so she had grown to womanhood surrounded by hirelings, in an atmosphere tinged with the yellow of gold.

From her earliest remembrances every one had been *paid* for what they had done for her; servants, nurses, governesses, and, later on, the teachers and professors at the fashionable boarding school she attended. Bursting with the yearning to love, and to be loved, (that most fatal quality to woman's peace which her mother had bestowed upon her,) she had sought response first among her fellow students, and then from the men and women she had met in life, only to be thrust back into herself with the bitter realization that the wealth of love she had it in her to bestow was not what was most desired of her.

Lost in the intricacies of the game he played, with such unvarying skill and success, her father only recalled her existence in time to make his will, leaving her sole heiress to his millions, and a bit more lonely, in her isolation, when his life was so suddenly snapped.

She had continued living in the big, empty, house installing a distant connection as a nominal chaperone, and growing year by year more warped by bitterness as society fawned at her feet.

Slow tears gathered in her eyes as her inner vision dwelt upon the past, with its faint, sweet memory of the only true tenderness she had ever known. Her gaze swept the room with its costly furnishings, its rich rugs and tapestries. "Money is necessary to the body, but it can't feed nor warm, nor comfort the heart," she grieved, and then, as if in answer to her need, a maid entered, bringing her a letter.

"I don't know whether or not you will remember me," the letter ran. "But I recall *you* as a nice girl, with black hair flying, and very thin, long legs, and you were afraid of the cows when you came to visit us. Father says you are of the good old stock, tho, and so you won't mind taking me under your wing for awhile, even if I *am* a 'country cousin!' Father has made a lot of money in an oil well he struck while drilling for water, down here on the farm, and now he wants me 'to get polished up a bit,' he says, so I'm coming to you for awhile, and please don't mind it, will you, for I'll try not to bother you one bit, and I'll be with you the day after this reaches you."

Miss Vandee reread the letter twice, striving to recall the dim remembrance she had of a little flower-faced girl in the old homestead, and, as the memory of her brightened, it seemed to bring with it the scent of hayfields, sweet and fresh, which, vague and distant as it was, gave her a sense of rest and wholesomeness. A new hope awoke in her—surely this child of nature would be real, and perhaps unspoiled enough to yield her the love she craved.

The next afternoon she announced the expected arrival to those who dropped in to tea. Algy Dumont was again present, and brightened visibly when she said:

"My cousin's father has lately made a large fortune in oil, so, as Prosperity is his only heir, she will inherit great wealth"—but he had the grace to blush, as he encountered her mocking little smile.

"My dear Miss Vandee," expostulated a beardless youth who wore an eyeglass, "You didn't say her name was *Prosperity*?"

She nodded—"She was a twin, and her sister was called 'Peace,' but the latter died in infancy—a fate brought upon it by its *name*, I suppose, while the former still lives—which goes to prove that Prosperity is of the earth, earthy, but Peace belongs to the Gods." ☪ ☪

No one responded, possibly because no one knew what to say, but Reggy King drew nearer, and leaned over her chair. Reggy fondly believed himself to be deeply intellectual, and looked forward confidently to possessing Beatrice, (and her fortune) when the time should be ripe. "I saw a sight today that reminded me of you," he bent to

murmur in her ear, with that peculiarly confidential air of monopoly which he assumed with her.

"It must have been an angel"—flippantly.

"You are higher than the angels," he assured her. "No, it was a poor little newsboy who had been taken ill on the street—they were hustling him into the ambulance, and I wish that you had seen him to be roused to help!"

She smiled, "I'm glad that *you* were there to do it!"


Reggy's glance wavered a moment, but he recovered himself and went on—"You see, *you* are meant for bigger things than just these tea tipplings, and function fripperies. It seems a waste of good material for you to chafe under the inanity of such routine—why not lift yourself out of it all into a more congenial atmosphere, where you could be at your best by helping others?"

She interrupted with a laugh—"What a flow of eloquence! So you suppose I have waited, all these years, to have *you* tell me all this? I have, at this moment, twenty-five families, disabled, and quite *satisfied* to subsist upon my *bounty*! Also, I have always *visited* my pensioners trying to give of *myself* as well as of my charity—but it isn't as ideal as it is painted! Some are so barefaced, in their demands, that I almost feel like leaving them to suffer unaided, and others are so familiar I have to protect myself, or they would be patronizing me for my desire to help them!—Each and every one is so patently eager for my *benefits*, and so indifferent to my proffered *friendliness*, that I long ago gave up the effort to do more than fill coal bins, and mouths. As to public charities, of course I give proportionately to them, too!"

¶ Reggy persisted—"Still, you should be at some *big* work, for in this life of idleness you are wasted—I have always felt you to be the equal of any *man*!"

She shrugged, "*Equal*? My dear boy, nature itself forbids *that*! Woman should be *above* man—if she isn't, she is apt to fall *below*!"

"Here! Here!" broke in a chorus of voices, while Reggy argued, "I don't see what you consider being '*above man*' or his equal, if it does not consist in rivaling him intellectually, usurping his power as a man, yet you were *not* for *suffrage*!"

Beatrice rose impatiently—"O, run away, tiresome boy! You couldn't understand if I told you, or you would never have asked that question." 

Feeling dismissed, Reggy sulkily took his departure, followed by the rest, and Miss Vandee drew a long breath of relief as she mounted the stairs to her room to prepare for dinner, and the reception of her cousin—"Now for a whiff of nature—I *hope*!" she sighed.



CHAPTER II

AN HOUR later, there was the sound of light feet running thru the hall, and a small, rounded figure appeared upon the threshold as Miss Vandee went eagerly forward. For a moment the two girls stood gazing at each other, mutely interrogative, the one tall, graceful, dark; her slender form clad in softly trailing laces; and the other, short, plump, fair, with rosy cheeks, and merry eyes, simply garbed in woolen gown—each, in herself, typical of widely differing worlds. Then Prosperity laughed, and when she did it she did it thoroughly—dimples dented cheeks and chin, while even her sunny hair seemed to bob in sympathy.

With a sudden rush of glad welcome Beatrice took the bright face between her hands, “I shall never forgive New York if it changes *you*!” she cried, but the girl laughed back: “I would, if it made me *look like you*!”

Prosperity’s naive wonder over the subtle mysteries of French cooking made the usually solemn, and lonely ordeal of dining at home, a feast of merriment. “I thought *I* could cook *everything*, but I don’t feel, now, that I have ever really known what it was to *dine* before tonight!” she laughed.

¶ Her quick interest in all about her gave Beatrice a new realization of her own surroundings, as tho she saw everything thru her cousin’s eyes and for the first time. “So you play?” she asked, seeing Prosperity’s glance linger fondly on the grand piano, when they returned to the drawing room.

“O yes! I *can* play!” was the eager response, “There was a lady who boarded with us during the summer months, for several years, and she taught me—I love music!”

Beatrice watched her as she sat at the big instrument, her short skirts, and small feet swinging far above the pedals, and her round, babyish face dimpling in delight, but, as she lost all thought of herself in her music, the childish features became irradiated as if she listened to the whisperings of angels, and Beatrice felt her own spirit swept out upon a sea of melting melody, where hope sailed like a stately ship of promise, winged by Peace.

Dreams enfolded her softly, and it was with a start of dismay she came back to earth when Prosperity rose, at last, and joined her before the fireplace. “You are a genius!” she cried impetuously, “I haven’t felt so near Heaven since I was an innocent, hopeful, happy child! I wish you could play your magic music continuously!”

The girl flushed with pleasure: “Do you *really* think I’m a genius?”

¶ Beatrice laughed, “Nature again, and what a relief! If you had been

trained in *my* world of insincerities you would have disclaimed any such pretensions. What *makes* you so *real*—tell me what you do, and how you live, to keep yourself so honest?”

Prosperity seated herself, tailor fashion, on the rug: “I don’t do much of anything. Father never let me work as other farmer’s daughters had to do. You see, I was all he had, and he liked to make a pet of me, so I was sent to school, and expected to amuse him, and that was about all, till I learned to play, and now I make up little things on the piano, evenings, till he falls asleep or Roger comes in—”

Beatrice interrupted—“Who is Roger?”

“Why he is—he is just *Roger*—I’m going to marry him!”

“O!” breathed Miss Vandee, then, involuntarily, “Aren’t you afraid he is marrying you for your new fortune?”

Prosperity’s laugh was good to hear. “Why, we have been loving each other *always*! We were only glad about father’s finding the oil so we could get married sooner, because, before that, we thought we would have to wait till Roger paid off the mortgage on his own farm, you see! But father said I must see the world a bit, first, now that I could—so I came to *You*.”

“And I am to take the part of Mephistopheles, am I? Aren’t you afraid ‘the world’ will make you forget your Roger?”

There was living poetry in the girl’s eyes as she answered, simply, “I *couldn’t*, you know!” Beatrice stirred restlessly, “I wish *I* had a ‘Roger’,” she declared, smiling whimsically.

“Roger likes to talk to father about politics, and *things*,” Prosperity ran on, “*He* thinks everything is going to be *changed*; he says everything is already changed, and we can’t stop, now, so the quickest way is to work the puzzle out to a *finish*, and he says that will mean a bloodless revolution, and upheaval of all old conditions and standards. But father just lets him talk till he gets tired, and then *he* always says there is *no* way of bringing *peace* into the world—we have got to *fight* till we die, one way or another!”

The picture painted by Prosperity’s words rose vividly before Miss Vandee’s mental vision; the old war-horse listening to the brave tooting of the colt bursting with life and its own importance; and the girl’s flowering sweetness filling their lives with the only real joy of living—Love embodied.

“How cosy it all sounds—your father, Roger, you, all grouped about the big fireplace; or upon the rose hung old porch; exchanging ideas—hopes—love! Child, do you realize how rich you have always been in the *best* things of life?”

A smothered yawn interrupted her envious musings, and she sprang up, in self reproach.

“You poor little country mouse—I suppose you are half dead for sleep and I never thought of it. Come to bed at once, or you’ll never get your eyes opened wide enough to study ‘the world’ you have come to see!”

“But I have read Society Novels, lots of them” protested Prosperity,

sleepily following, “and I think *living* like that must be just like a *dream*, isn’t it?”

Her cousin laughed, as she kissed her good night at the door of her room—“Like the dreams one has after eating lobster mayonnaise!”

You have been the *rich* little girl, and *I* the *poor* one, dear! Why wasn’t I sent down to at least get a *taste* of your joyous love-life when I was a child, I wonder? Think of all we have missed in not knowing each other all these years, and what *I* have *lost* in not knowing you and Roger and uncle and the farm!”





CHAPTER III

SEVERAL days later they received invitations to a large ball, and Prosperity was enraptured. "I love dancing—but oh! What can I wear?"

Beatrice looked thoughtful, then she said, hesitatingly, "I was going to suggest a general shopping excursion, but I was afraid you might feel I was taking too much upon myself!"

"*Too much?* Why how *could* you—didn't father put me into your hands? And I know he has deposited a lot of our new oil money at your Bankers, so I can draw on that for all I need."

"Then I'll see to it that you are fitted out in fine order—there is plenty of time for my good madam to make you a gown before this ball comes off."

Consequently, the next few mornings were spent in shopping, a new delight for the country bred girl, tho she confided to her cousin that, if she had not had the comfortable consciousness of a big bank account to brace her, she could never have encountered the haughty females behind the counters, whose supercilious manners, and imposing hair-dressing, appalled her.

It was a pleasure to pilot her about the vast city, and Beatrice found herself freshening under the charm of vivid interest which emanated from the girl like an electrical current. They spent nearly every afternoon either in the park or "prowling," as Prosperity called their adventures, into parts of the city where Miss Vandee's electric had never before been seen, and their evenings they filled in with long, cosy chats over the fire and music, Miss Vandee having cancelled all engagements for herself.

"I want to save you to appear, like a new star, on the night of the ball," she had declared, it being by far the greatest social event of the season, and she closed her door even against the "tea tipplers," while she and the girl drew closer, and nearer, in their daily, intimate life together.

Prosperity nurtured in the very lap of nature, surrounded by simple home life, and the tenderest of love, from babyhood, felt a deep compassion for this glitteringly empty existence, and opened wide her heart to warm the coldness which had so long chilled her cousin's spirit. The revelation of how inadequate is the possession of mere wealth to fulfil the needs of a woman's soul, kept her from being dazzled by the unaccustomed luxury and riches, surrounding her, for she recognized that—contrasted to the life Beatrice had led, she, herself, had been the truly rich one.

So the glittering display about her on every side lost value in her eyes,

and she grew to feel an intense desire to make up to her cousin for all those starved, lost years, each of which had left its own bitter imprint. ¶ As for Beatrice, she felt as a frost-nipped flower might feel when it is rescued from the blasting north winds, and sheltered in a radiance of summer sunshine. For the first time in her life she knew what companionship meant, and she eagerly unfolded, to this sweet new influence, till her heart laughed within her.

Insensibly she began to lean upon the girl, obeying the hidden instinct of nature to depend upon that which is wholesome, and true, and real, while Prosperity as unconsciously responded by a tacit protectiveness—a mother trait born in some women, and developed by another's need, (irrespective of age) when the call comes.

She felt that she had been sent by some mysterious, guiding power, to look after her cousin, who for all her vast possessions, her haughty ways, and caustic tongue, she found to be only a loving, lonely girl, whose heart had starved amidst her plenty.

Naturally everything was engrossingly new, and interesting, and her letters home were vivid with bright pictures of all she saw and heard, but what most engrossed her was her cousin, and, as the days drew them closer in their sweet intimacy, she lost herself in a passion of tenderness that was strangely maternal.

“ I wish we could go on like this forever,” Beatrice declared, one night, as they sipped their afterdinner coffee, and toasted their slippered toes before the fire blazing in the cozy library, while the wind, howling out of doors, rendered their secluded peace and good cheer the more delicious by contrast. Prosperity smiled back acquiescence: “ Let's!” she urged.

Beatrice shook her head; “ Uncle sent you here to ‘ see the world ’ so I must show it up to you but why did he *want* you to see it? Does he wish you to forget ‘ Roger’?”

Prosperity laughed, then suddenly sobered: “ You poor dear—how invariably you twist intentions into something sinister! *Roger* wanted me to come as much as father, for he hates a city, and all this sort of thing, so I won't get much chance at all this, after I am married to him, because he says, once he *gets* me, he'll never let me out of his sight! Besides, he couldn't arrange to leave the farm till all the crops were in, you know. So we all thought this was a good way to fill in the waiting time before my wedding, and oh! I am *glad* I came! In spite of my love for home and all of them, I feel as if I never could *leave you* again!” She spoke impetuously, slipping into her familiar place at her cousin's feet on the hearth rug. “ I feel as if you had been *calling* me, all these years, but I never *heard* you, nor knew you were needing me—and that you will soon have some *special* need of me and that is why I was sort of *sent* to you to *help*!”

Beatrice stooped to press her cheek against the bright head resting on her knee. “ You have given me all I have ever known of sympathy—of loving comprehension, and comradeship—it is all wonderful to me! Perhaps it is because of the marvel of it that I feel, as you say, it is the

beginning of some new life for me—for I *do* feel as tho your coming held some strange meaning—as if in preparation for something else to come! But, whatever happens, you must not let me absorb you—I mustn't be selfish—please don't *let* me be!”

Prosperity impulsively kissed her. “You poor dear, you have never had any chance to be selfish, and I think it's only fair you *should* be spoiled a little *now*, so I *am* going to do it if I can! You need some mothering.” *so so*

Beatrice laughed, a trifle unsteadily; “Such a mother—half my size, and younger besides!”

The girl looked dreamily into the fire; “Age has nothing to do with it—it's what is *in* a person that counts! I have always been Father's pet, of course, and yet I have always sort of mothered even him—ever since we were left alone together. I guess it's my own special way of loving—Roger says I do it to *him*, too!”

Beatrice looked fondly down at the fire-flushed face. “You simply forget all about yourself, that's all! You live in the lives of others—You are like a sunbeam, unconsciously giving warmth, and comfort, to all you touch. That's why I'm afraid I shall absorb you into my life—my needs—and be selfish!”

But Prosperity's only reply was a laugh, so gay and bright it scattered somber thoughts, refuting all claim to saintliness by its hearty, vitalizing youth.





CHAPTER IV

AT LAST, however, this delightful tete-a-tete came to an end, for the day of the grand ball arrived, bringing with it a creation of tulle and lace that resembled whipped cream. "I do wish Roger could see me," Prosperity sighed, gazing at the bewildering image reflected in the mirror.

Beatrice was scanning her with the delight of an artist. "He might eat you—you look delicious enough!"

But the girl laughed, "He would only give me one of his regular old bear hugs—and muss me all up!"

"Then it's lucky he is not here to spoil that creation of loveliness," asserted Miss Vandee.

They were late in arriving, and as they entered the crowded ball room Beatrice felt a glow of pleasure, rare to her, as she contrasted the fresh sweetness of her little cousin to those around her—"a wild rose among hot house exotics," she thought with a rush of proprietary tenderness.

¶ "Good evening, Miss Vandee, where on earth did you pick up my little friend of the Prairies?"

Prosperity turned at the sound of the voice behind her—

"O, Mr. Sinclair—and I had forgotten you lived in New York!"

¶ He laughed. "Not spoiled, yet, and as cruelly honest as when she was among her beloved plains, where I first found her, three summers ago!" ☞ ☞

Beatrice turned to the girl—"Why didn't you tell me you knew him?"

¶ Prosperity hardly heard her, for the music was throbbing alluringly, and her foot beat irrepressibly to the lilting strains.

Sinclair laughed again, with a boyish joyousness new in him, and drew her in among the dancers.

Miss Vandee stared after them in dumb wonder, "and that is the blasé bore I have always avoided, as a lifeless stick" she marveled.

¶ Her eyes followed them as they wove in and out among the whirling couples, while she listened listlessly to the chatter of the group that had gradually gathered about her, when suddenly she felt her eyes drawn by the magnetism of a glance, and looking up, encountered the fixed gaze of a tall, dark man, standing just behind her.

For one long moment she was spell bound, absorbed, lost in the enfolding, compelling gaze. A subtle force seemed to thrill from him to enthrall her senses, and she came to herself with a start as Reggy King's lank figure hid the vision from view.

"Anything I can do for you?" he asked, bending over her solicitously, and with the air of proprietorship she resented. But she did not notice it now.

"Tell me who it was standing just behind me—the man you elbowed out of the way."

He looked surprised; "Paul Heath? Why, surely you must have met him—at least to know him by sight! He has been going everywhere for months, and Town Topics has been spinning webs about him for a year past."

"Paul Heath," she echoed, shrinking, "Ah, *no!* the man they have been throwing mud at, in that wretched little paper, *couldn't* look like *that!*"

Reggy shrugged, "That is Heath, all right, tho. Odd that you have never before met him, for he is asked all over, in spite of rumors, and the fact that no one knows who he is, or where he came from. He has the trick of making himself deuced agreeable tho—and I dare say he is no worse than the rest of the men about town!"

He rattled on, but she was so unresponsive, and absent minded that he at last suggested an ice in the conservatory as preferable to the exertion of the one sided conversation.

It was cool and quiet in the dimly lighted retreat, and Beatrice leaned far back among the palms glad to rest, and to be alone with her thoughts, while Reggy went to forage for refreshment.

She still felt the magnetism of that intense gaze, and it startled her! What could it mean? Never before had she known what it was to thrill beneath the eyes of any man, yet at the first glance of this strange adventurer she had trembled, had felt confused, like any raw school girl

Suddenly she was aroused from her disturbing meditations by hearing her name spoken.

"Awfully queer girl," the voice was saying, "clever, but so deuced odd—never even plays Bridge, and just wants to *talk ideas*, you know! Now, to my mind, a truly charming, nice girl only wants to do what a fellow wants her to do, and sweet lips were made for kissing—not to talk high-falutin' tommy rot! She gives away a lot to church and charity, and all that, but she never goes in for settlement work, or any of the fads that women hump themselves over these days. She is just *aloof*—sort of a misfit!"

Here a deeper voice impatiently broke in, "But you say she is very rich, in her own right, and unencumbered by near relatives?"

"O, ye gods, yes! rich as Croesus. If she wasn't she wouldn't be stood for. She's too damned notional and lofty! But she hasn't got any kin (except this little country cousin, whose Governor has struck oil, on his own hook) and she lives alone in her big house with only an old woman to chaperone her, for the looks of the thing!"

The eavesdropper stirred—she had heard enough!—and the speakers rose from behind the bank of palms to stroll in the direction of the ball room. In doing so they passed near Beatrice, and, with a start, she recognized Paul Heath. Her nervous movement dislodged a vase of roses, throwing it to the ground with a clatter, and bringing both men to her side.

Heath knelt at her feet to gather up the debris, while his companion bowed to her with an air of guilt, which would have aroused her amusement at any other time, but now she was conscious only of the kneeling figure at her feet. He raised his head and their glances met. ¶ Richards performed a hasty introduction and made his escape, leaving Heath to make peace.

Leisurely he gathered up the bruised roses, and laid them in her lap. "Do you know, I feel as if I had known you always," he began, ignoring the embarrassing contretemps assuming apparently, that she had not overheard what had been said and seating himself beside her. ¶ "Perhaps we have met before on some other planet," she responded, with an effort at ease.

He smiled lingeringly down into her eyes. "One might readily remember you thru changing worlds—you are a distinctive woman."

¶ Against her will she flushed, and he was quick to note her lowered lashes ☪ ☪

"Isn't it George Eliot who speaks of the two types of women—the woman's woman, and the man's woman? When I first saw you, tonight I knew you were of the latter class. Women can't understand you, but men adore you."

She tried to shake off the feeling of oppression settling upon her, answering, with an effort at lightness, "Coming from a man I accept your remark as a compliment, but, if men were to be judged by the pattern we see in society, your words could hardly be considered flattering."

"Why?"

His question surprised her. "Do you seriously look upon the dilettantes one meets in the social round as 'men'? Mr. *Richards*, for instance?"

¶ His brows contracted, "Surely *some* of them are awfully good chaps—you let yourself be too severe!" She felt rebuked for bad taste in referring to Richards.

The frowning expression of his face attracted her, and made her feel like a small child being justly reprimanded—she enjoyed the scolding as being preferable to the honey which insincerity had always proffered her.

"Perhaps, then, it is this hot-house atmosphere we all move in which is at fault," she at last conceded. "There is Lawrence Sinclair, for instance. I have known him for ten years, and never caught a glimpse of the real man in him till tonight, when it came out in response to the naturalness of my little country cousin!"

"Doesn't that go to prove that it is as much *your* fault, if men are less than they might be, as it is the fault of society? Instead of helping them you ridicule them—is that generous?"

No one had ever before talked to her like this, and she glowed with the pleasure of fencing with an equal.

"There is one leading characteristic which Adam bequeathed to his descendants," she retorted, "and that is the masculine trick of invariably casting all the blame upon the *woman*! Poor Eve, she was

not only expected to resist, and withstand, temptation on her *own* account, but was also held responsible for Adam's fall!"

He interrupted her, "You are not logical. If *Eve* had kept herself unspotted from the world, Adam *never* would have ea'en of the tree of forbidden fruit!"

She laughed back at him, tingling with the exhilaration of mental combat. "Adam would not have felt *justified* in doing so, but he *would*, inevitably, have taken his stolen apple behind some big bush, and shamefacedly *eaten* it, all the same!"

Heath broke out into irrepressible laughter. "You are incorrigible—daughter of Eve!"

The laugh softened his features into something very winning, and Beatrice wished she could call it forth again. "He is the only really interesting man I have ever known" she thought within herself, forgetting to withdraw her gaze, as she scrutinized his features, and then blushing hotly as he turned, suddenly, and met her eyes.

¶ As tho responding to something he read in her glance he bent over her, impetuous, eager, but the words brimming his lips were cut short by Reggy King's voice exclaiming, "Here I am, at last, and behold the total wreck I have become!"

He certainly did show signs of wear. His immaculate shirt front, and broadcloth coat, were flecked with cream; his cravat twisted under his left ear, and in his hands a half empty dish, from which dripped melting ice cream.

"What *have* you been doing?" laughed Beatrice.

"Doing? Well if that isn't gratitude for you! A man can nearly give up his life for a dish of cream to tickle a woman's palate—and she asks him what he has been doing!"

He sank down, exhausted, at her side, to rearrange his tie, and wipe off the disfiguring fleck, with his handkerchief.

"Awful jam—horribly managed affair" he grumbled. "Fact is, women don't understand the science of entertaining. So long as the ball room is well waxed, and everything available is decorated, they are satisfied, and the refreshments can be served a la free-lunch-counter!"

"Did you see anything of my cousin?"

Reggy nodded, still absorbed with his grievance. "She actually seems to be having a good time of it—funny, isn't it?"

"It's new—we all like new toys to play with—but it's time we went home, now, if you aren't too exhausted to hunt her up for me."

Sulkily he obeyed, leaving them to stroll slowly back to the ball room.

¶ "What does it make you think of?" she asked, watching the gay scene before them.

"A ball room—simply that, and nothing more—I don't aspire to reading between the lines! What do you see written there?"

"Ennui, disappointment, heart-burnings, sandwiched with 'envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness'."

"And no honest enjoyment?"

She shook her head, "That is omitted from functions!"

“Ye gods!” he cried, “What imp has distorted your vision that you see life inverted;—is it indigestion?”

She resented his flippancy. “Possibly only old age! I am becoming passé—having spent ten years in these trappings of the cap and bells!”

¶ She turned away from him with a haughty little lift of her head, furious with herself to find what power to annoy this strange man had.

¶ “I am ready, now,” broke in her cousin’s blithe voice at her side, and, without a glance at Heath, she followed the girl.

He was not at all depressed by her displeasure, however, and she found him still at her side when her electric was called. As they stood waiting, under the starlit dome of the night skies, he turned to her.

“I’m punished enough, now—please! Say you forgive my impertinence and tell me I may call tomorrow.”

“I shall not be at home!”

He ignored her evasion, “Please!” imploringly.

The sudden touch of humility in his tone pleased her, but she would not answer as she took her seat beside Prosperity.

He held open the door, preventing their chauffeur from starting the car,

“I simply can’t let you go till you say ‘yes’,” he pleaded, low and tensely; then smiled triumphantly into the night as he caught her whispered word of assent, ere they whisked out of sight down the winding avenue.





CHAPTER V

WHEN Prosperity joined her cousin at their late breakfast, the following morning, she looked confused and upset; "I'm all twisted 'round," she declared. "Never in my life before did I get up so late, and it makes everything feel queer. Why, this is afternoon, and we have just *skipped* breakfast!"

"That is being 'fashionable'," smiled Beatrice. "Society seldom breakfasts—it lunches, drinks tea, dines, and eats at all hours thru the night! We will have tea, this afternoon, to make up for the lost breakfast ☙ ☙"

Prosperity looked expectant, "What do we do at tea?"

"Oh, we do nothing—we never do—but we wear pretty gowns and concoct weak tea for any one who happens to drop in. I have been 'not at home,' since your arrival, for I didn't want any one to see you till you were full fledged in the latest mode. But since you have stormed the citadel (as you did at the ball, last night) I decided you were en debutant, so I told every one I met to drop in, and get a nearer view of you, today. Don't be alarmed if Algy Dumont makes love to you—it's only his little way!"

Prosperity looked startled, "Oh, but I'm engaged to Roger!"

Beatrice laughed, "That *will* be a stunning blow, for, you see, I did not know the fact when I told poor Algy that you were a little princess done in oil!"

A puzzled glance questioned her.

"It is only that the dear boy is poor," she explained. "You see, when his father died, he left his millions mostly to charities, giving his only heir merely the pittance of ten thousand a year, interest, the principal controlled by a trust Co., too! Really, it *was* hard on the infant, when you consider that his cigarettes, and wines, alone *used* to cost him *nearly* that amount, and poverty has been aptly described as 'the lack created by *comparison*'."

Still Prosperity looked in the dark, apparently unable to see the connections between the young man's deplorable poverty, and the fact that he might make love to her. Her cousin watched the puckered forehead in amusement, "What an innocent!" she exclaimed, half enviously, "But really, I begin to feel thankful for 'Roger'—otherwise my little lamb, you would surely be fleeced, and offered up as a sacrifice to mammon, upon the altar of matrimony! Can't you comprehend a man marrying just for a bank account, or making love to the golden calf, which, quite incidentally, takes the form of any willing woman?"

¶ It was late in the afternoon before Heath came. Against her will Beatrice had found herself eagerly watching for his arrival, striving to

hide her disappointment as each new comer had failed her expectations, so that when he did, at last, appear before her, she visited her resentment upon him by scarcely vouchsafing him a civil greeting. ¶ He turned from her with a half suppressed smile. He knew the subtle power he wielded, for he had often profited by its use with both men and women; but he also knew that this one woman was not to be conquered as others might be. So he crossed the room, and half withdrew himself in the deep embrasure of the window.

As he had anticipated, her eyes followed him, for his quiet withdrawal had intimated a wounded dignity which her openly chilly reception of him might well have roused in any man of self respect. From his retreat he watched her growing restlessness; the uneasy glances stealing towards him while she smiled, and dispensed witticisms and tea; and he almost laughed aloud when, abandoning all pretense, she suddenly followed him across the room, leaving the tea table deserted.

Paul turned at her approach, but ignored both the snub he had received and this consequent victory. "Look," he began, drawing her attention to the passing crowds outside, "Did you ever see anything more passionately intense than the expression of that woman's face?"

¶ Beatrice, following his glance, saw a haggard, thinly clad creature hurrying past, cradling a baby, whose small face she pressed against hers, as tho striving to shelter it from the biting east wind, while in her eyes there burned a fire of unquenchable devotion which defied all material miseries, and deified the human. A quick half sob broke from the woman at his side, and he bent his gaze curiously upon her.

¶ "You look at that poor creature almost with envy," he ventured.

¶ She recovered herself. "She is poor only in the things of this world—and *that* all passes away—but she is rich in the happiness that can never die, for she knows what it is to love!"

"Love?" doubtfully weighing the word, "That is only the maternal instinct which women share with the lower animals," he argued.

"And is there no trace of the Divine even in the brutes?" she flashed back, "What could be more sublime than the fidelity which dogs so often show, a faithfulness, unto death, even for *cruel* masters! Is *that* all just 'brute instinct?' If so, then I think *humanity* would better *imitate* them! As for myself I would be content if I knew of *one* person who would do as much for love of *me*!"

"And how about yourself?" he put in, "Would *you* do as much for one *other* person, because of love?"

The hot blood surged over her face. "For any one I loved I could *die*!" she cried, with a passion which thrilled, and stirred him, adding, as if in sudden remembrance of herself, "That is, *if* I loved any one!"

¶ He let his eyes rest upon her, musingly, "I think you could," he said, quietly, "You were born to suffer, and to love, as few women can and few women could be so *loved*!"

She started, as if stung by his words, recalling the overheard conversation of the night before. "A *rich* woman is *never* loved!" she challenged.

¶ He met her accusing glance steadily, "Absurd! Granting this to be a

material age, when men are not averse to taking marriage as a means to an end, there are still women to be found who possess that rare quality which elevates a man beyond the touch of such sordid considerations—women for whom a world were well lost—and of such are you!”

¶ Her gaze wavered and fell. She felt him to be false, untrue, yet his tone, thrilling with emotion, carried her beyond herself. She could not answer, could not again meet his eyes, and obeying a sudden impulse, for flight, she turned and left him without a word.

He watched her as she crossed the room, to resume her place at the neglected tea table.

“She, and her fortune, are well worth the winning,” he mused, “But I’m deuced afraid I might end by really falling in love with her, and that would be a mistake. A man should always keep the mastery, and he only plays the fool when he is in love!”





CHAPTER VI

THE theatre was crowded, and humming with conversation. It was rather early, and the orchestra was just assembling with a scraping of violins, and cellos, rasping to the nerves. A few of the box parties were beginning to arrive, furnishing matter for discussion to the humbler folk.

"I wonder how it feels to ride here in an electric coupe, or limousine, and sit in a box," sighed a pretty girl to her young man, who responded with masculine scorn concerning feminine folly.

"It would be so delicious to trail about in a gown like the one that woman has on," continued the little Eve, wistfully regarding a jewel bedecked vision above her.

"She ain't a patch on you," comforted her admirer, and the pretty little girl dimpled with pleasure.

Just then there was a stir in the house, and lorgnettes were directed towards a large box at the right of the stage where a tall woman, in soft grey and silver draperies, advanced to the front of the box, followed by a fluffy vision in pink; a motherly looking woman, in black bringing up the rear.

"Who is that?" queried the pretty girl. ¶ "That is the heiress, Miss Vandee, with her chaperone, and the little one in pink is the cousin that's visiting her; the little one is the pick of the lot."

But his companion's gaze was riveted upon the woman in the soft, clinging draperies of grey and silver. "She looks like the moon just showing behind the clouds at night," she murmured, in an ecstasy of admiration. "Oh, wouldn't I love to be her!"

At the close of the first act Miss Vandee's box was filled with the usual set, Reggy King as close to her chair as he could get.

Prosperity beamed radiance. "I never dreamed anything could be so lovely! I am enjoying everything so much; I feel like a bubble!"

"Please don't burst," pleaded Dicky Hatch, "it might be disagreeable—and I should miss you so!"

She laughed. "I'll contain my joy, then, and you must tell me about all the people you know here, and if they are as happy as they look!"

¶ "Miss Vandee has already taught you not to trust to appearances, has she?" broke in Paul Heath's voice.

The girl turned in surprise, "Why, when did you come in?"

"Just in time to overhear your last remark, and to grieve that the bloom had so soon been rubbed off the peach!" As he spoke he took his place behind Miss Vandee's chair, but she neither turned nor appeared conscious of his arrival, and during the next act he remained a silent spectator ♣ ♣

"What do you think of it?" Reggy questioned her, as the curtain fell again ☞ ☞

"Of the plot of the play? I approve of it!"

"You don't believe in divorce, then?"

She swept the theatre with her glance—"Look at the effects of it all about us."

Reggy grinned openly as he counted the divorcees of their acquaintance ☞ ☞

"It doesn't speak very well for the bliss of the married state, does it?"

"It doesn't speak well for humanity!" asserted Beatrice, "why should it be difficult for two people to *live* together, in harmony, when they must *once* have thought they loved each other enough to marry?"

¶ Reggy interrupted, "Ah, that is just it—*Love!* The trouble lies in the fact that they expect love to last. Whereas there isn't one woman out of a million who could keep a man's love, and yet, once they get married to a chap, they think they own him, and they can nag him to the limit!"

Miss Vandee laughed scornfully—"And the men? I suppose you think *they* are capable of keeping a *woman's* love, even when they fail to keep her respect; even when they show up selfish, sordid, brutal!"

¶ Prosperity's bright voice broke in, "It seems to me you have illustrated the causes for divorce—you two—the way you have been going for each other's sex! Heavens, if you were married, there would be another scandal for the courts to settle!"

Reggy instantly capitulated, throwing a glance at Beatrice which was meant to propitiate. "I said there wasn't one woman out of a million who could keep a man—and we all know *whom* that one woman is!" he uttered softly, gazing at her with pleading eyes that begged absolution ☞ ☞

But she was not looking at him. "I believe," she began, dreamily, as if forgetting that she spoke aloud, "that, if I had once vowed to stand by any one, I would keep my vow, even if I had ceased to love, or respect him; even tho he was unworthy, if he should cling to me, or need me, or love me, I would be true to my promise, cost me what it might!"

Behind her, Heath felt a sudden thrill quiver thru him at her words. Instantly he took alarm at this sign of weakness in himself, and, acting upon an impulse of self preservation, he said, "Miss Vandee is such an oracle it is small wonder she believes so implicitly in herself!"

It was the first time he had addressed her that evening, and, at these words, her face burned hotly. She raised her head with a lift of disdain, fixing her attention upon the stage as the curtain was rung up for the last act.

She felt his eyes upon her, and pressed her lips firmly together to conceal their quiver. "I believe I hate him," she told herself, "he speaks to me, treats me, as no other man has ever dared do!"

Suddenly he bent over her, forgetting every other consideration except the imperative need of reconciliation. "Look at me!"

His compelling tone swayed her toward obedience, but she braced her will to resist. "He shall *not* conquer *every* time," she said within herself *so so*

Closer and closer he drew, till she felt his breath stir the hair upon her forehead, then the low voice, thrilling now with undisguised passion, again impelled her:—"Look at me!"

With a sobbing sigh she lifted her face to his, and their gaze held them enthralled for one breathless moment. Then he fell back among the shadows, as if his soul was satisfied.

Stirred to the depths, she yet strove to reason against the throbbing passion swaying her, struggling to repel his influence. "I know nothing *good* of him," she forced herself to reiterate to her insistently clamoring heart. "Nothing has ever come to me of him save evil rumors, and he never sought me out till he was assured that I was rich and alone in the world. He came to New York from no one knows where, and he came alone, and unfriended."

At this thought she paused, a sudden pity overwhelming her—"alone and *unfriended*." In spite of her wealth, her position, she knew what it meant to be alone, and unfriended, at the very core of her inmost being, and, with a sudden rush of comprehending sympathy, her heart went out to Heath, defying reason, and caution, as a carrier dove takes no account of the adverse winds blowing across its pathway, while it flies straight home.

A light sigh drifted to her from his shadowy corner behind her, and she thrilled at his near presence. "O what is this that has come to me?" she breathed. "I hardly know him, yet I obey his will. I answer to him as the violin responds to the master's touch upon its strings!"

She shivered, as at the clutch of icy fingers, and a premonition of sorrow shook her with strange foreboding. She was relieved when the final curtain fell, and she could make her escape from searching eyes, and curious questions.

Once alone in her bedroom she faced her own soul, probing deep down beyond conventions to the truth—she loved Paul Heath! Keeping vigil with her heart, she went over each word they had exchanged, every meeting, and parting, since the night when he had first come into her life at the ball.

Unbelieving, trembling, yet filled with a terrible joy, she sat thru the hours till the wintry dawn slowly crept up the East. Then, drawing aside the heavy curtains, she watched the heralding light creeping nearer, and nearer, bringing the new day. Yearningly she stretched out her arms to meet it—never again could she be as she had been, yesterday! Love had come to her, at last, in this strange and sudden way, offering her a cup which held she knew not what of bitterness, or sweetness! "O," she whispered to the dawning day, "Love, to a woman, is like death, for it is the *end* of her *own* life, and it means, to her, the *beginning* of either Heaven—or Hell!"



CHAPTER VII

IT WAS late the next afternoon when Beatrice descended. She had fallen into the deep sleep of utter exhaustion, and Prosperity had given orders not to disturb her slumbers.

A mood of melancholy possessed her as, heavy eyed and listless, she tried to interest herself in a book before the library fire, refusing to see any one on the plea of a headache.

Prosperity had gone out to keep an appointment with her modiste, so Miss Vandee's meditations were quite undisturbed. They were not pleasant, for the reaction had set in, and she was feeling the effects of the previous night's discovery, and secret surrender. She was inclined to sneer at her emotions, and to deny the results of her self-communings in the mystic dawning of a new day. "I am not a school girl, to fall in love after a dozen meetings with a man, and when I have not even been *asked* to do so!" she jeered at herself. "And besides, I am perfectly well aware that he is a barefaced fortune hunter with an unsavory reputation. Of course, I am *not* in love with him—I couldn't be!"

Having announced this decision to herself, she resolutely applied her mind to the contents of her book, and appeared to be so engrossed she failed to hear Prosperity's entrance, until that young lady playfully deprived her of the volume.

"News! news! and you sit at home, content to read fiction, when startling facts are afloat all about *you*! Algy Dumont is at last engaged *actually*, and to a western heiress—not 'done in oils,' tho! And oh—what *do* you think? Everybody is afraid *you* are going to marry *Paul Heath*, and they say——"

Beatrice jumped up, crimsoning, "Of course you *denied* it," laughing nervously, "tho it is really nothing new for my dear friends to so interest themselves in my private affairs! They marry me off to every man I am seen with, until they weary of each one in turn! It seems impossible for them to believe in my confirmed spinsterhood!"

Something new in her cousin made Prosperity regard her with arrested attention, and a certain comprehension, femininely subtle, flooded her with strange tenderness. She said nothing more of her "news," to the evident relief of Miss Vandee, and the contretemps passed without further allusion, but, with the prescience of a loving woman, the girl guessed at the war being waged by her cousin, and anxiously awaited the outcome.

The weeks that followed Beatrice passed as in a dream. The only reality being the absorbing influence which had come into her life. Wherever she went she was shadowed by Heath, and, in a spirit almost

of self defense, she battled against his masterfulness, even while her whole being thrilled in response.


And so things drifted till the night of the fancy dress ball. Paul had refused to tell what costume he was to go in, wagering that his disguise could not be pierced even by Beatrice, tho he knew that she and Prosperity were to appear as Night, and Morning, at his own suggestion.

¶ The entrance of the two girls caused quite a sensation, for no expense had been spared in their costumes, and the radiant rosiness of "dawn" formed a most striking contrast to the sable "night," who bore upon her head a circlet of stars, composed of brilliants, and surmounted by a young moon of silver, set with pale opals.

Eagerly Beatrice searched among the motley throng of masqueraders, striving to penetrate Heath's disguise, and at last she decided she had found him, concealed in the guise of a Capuchin monk, who bore himself with Paul's regal air which was much better fitted to the masterful Heath, than to a holy friar. There was little dancing, as every one seemed more interested in their efforts to discover the identity of friends thru their disguise, so Beatrice found it easy to keep in the neighborhood of her monk. Tho almost positive of having found him out, judging from his tall height, and imperious bearing, she yet wished to make sure it was he before addressing him, and of this she could not be certain until she had heard his voice, or his laugh. As if guessing her intentions, however, the monk kept as rigid a silence as tho he was indeed in the solitude of the cloister, avoiding speaking to any one, and wrapping himself in his monkish garb, as if desiring to keep himself "unspotted from the world," even by contact.

An Indian Chief, resplendent in war paint, attached himself to Beatrice. "Do you know who the ice king is?" he asked. "He has been shadowing you ever since you came in, tho keeping at a respectful distance."

¶ She glanced indifferently at a white robed figure glittering with icicles of glass, and crowned with a turban of cotton to represent snow. "Possibly he mistakes me for some one he knows," she answered, moving away in the wake of her friar, intent only upon keeping near enough to him to catch the sound of his voice, should his lips unseal.



¶ Her Indian Chief followed. "Look," he cried, pulling at her floating sable draperies to attract her attention—"Jove! I've heard of a 'death's head' at the feast, but this is the first time I have ever *seen* one!" 

She turned to look, and uttered a little gasp of horror, for only a few feet from her stood an apparently living skeleton. In the full glare of the brilliantly lighted room this most gruesome object stalked amidst the gay throng of masqueraders, a ghastly reminder of the transient element in all pleasure, and of its inevitable end!

Beatrice gazed, fascinated, while her Indian Chief ran on, "Gad, but it's cleverly done! The chap has evidently stood in those black tights while the skeleton was outlined on it in that glaring white paint, and that headpiece gives the final touch, drawn entirely down over his face like that, and painted to represent the perfect skull, grin and all!

Look at those living eyes, blinking behind the holes cut in the cloth—ugh!—they make my flesh creep! Wonder who the fellow can be! It's deuced original, as a costume, but he ran the risk of being put out, for that's a sight to make a woman faint!"

No one seemed to think of putting out the skeleton, however, on the contrary, the haughty court dames, and dainty milkmaids, pressed about him in a morbid delight over the grewsomeness of such an object amid such surroundings; and the attention of the whole room became centered upon it.

Beatrice felt a sick disgust surge thru her, and turned away to look for her Monk, but he was nowhere to be seen. In her momentary absorption he had evidently escaped her, and she bit her lip vexedly, for the hour of unmasking was near at hand, and if she could not prove to Heath that she had discovered his identity, beneath his disguise, before that time, of course he would not believe her, and she would lose her wager  .

Irritated, she vented her annoyance upon her companion, and, unable to get rid of him in any other way, feigned faintness, and asked him to go for a glass of water.

"It's that confounded skeleton that's upset you," declared the Indian Chief, starting at once upon the errand.

Once he had left her, she sought eagerly for her lost friar, but in vain. Evidently he had left the ball room, and she was on her way out to continue her search thru the other apartments when she ran into her Chief, once more. "Awfully sorry, simply couldn't get past the crush in the hall, out there, to fetch you the water. There's a man fallen in a fit, or something of the sort, and there is the deuce and all to pay. Some say he is dead."

A sudden dread clutched her. "Who was he?" breathlessly.

"Don't know—I couldn't get near enough to see, but some one said he wore a Capuchin costume."

Beatrice caught at his arm, "A Monk?" she gasped, "are you sure it was a *Monk*?" The lights about her began to sway and dance, as tho keeping time to the music, and then she heard the startled Indian exclaiming, "O! I say, are you going to faint,—did you know him? Look here, now, just you sit tight, and I'll go see how the chap is—don't believe he was dead at all, you know!"

Vaguely she realized he was pushing her into a seat, and tearing off the suffocating mask, "Now don't you go and faint—I'll be back in a jiffy and you'll see the chap will be O.K.," and he was gone.

The room swam dizzily about her head, and, as if vaguely seeking for support, she put forth both hands, blindly groping.

Suddenly she felt them gathered in a warm, strong clasp, and a voice she knew whispered, low and vibrantly, "Do you care as much as that?"

The mists of terror cleared, and she saw the white robed ice king bending over her, with Paul Heath's unmasked face close to her own.

¶ She clung to him, steadying her weakness by his strength, and gazed

up into his eyes oblivious of everything except that he was there, and safe—safe! “It *wasn't* you—it wasn't *you*,” was all she could say. He crushed her cold, clinging hands in his. He knew she had believed him to be the Monk whom misfortune had befallen, so he fully comprehended the meaning of her fear, and this sudden dropping of her guard, her utter surrender, intoxicated him.

He bent yet lower over her, possessing her with his eyes, his touch; his passion surging to his lips. Then he fell back, with a muttered curse, as the inevitable Indian broke in upon their oblivion. “It is all O.K. as I told you it would be—the chap wasn't dead, only in a bad faint. I'll bet it was that confounded skeleton that turned him sick—it was enough to knock out any one! You'd better go somewhere yourself, Miss Vandee, and rest, or you'll topple over, too!”

He was regarding her white, tense face, with open consternation, and looked relieved as she assented, placing her hand on Heath's arm as he led her away.

“Deuced queer girl,” declared the chief, gazing after their vanishing forms. “Who'd have thought the cold and chilly Miss Vandee would care enough for any mere man to faint at any danger which threatened him? And who the devil did she think it was?”

Prosperity, meeting them, was so frightened at the strange pallor of her cousin's face that she insisted upon returning home with her, and, as they stood waiting for their motor to be called, Paul drew Beatrice behind the shelter of a bank of palms. He put his hand beneath her chin and raised the drooping face to his. “Did you mean all that I saw in your eyes, tonight?”

Piteously she looked at him, as tho pleading with him not to test his power, then, suddenly, the veil seemed to be rent in twain before the Holy of Holies, and her soul gazed out at him thru eyes luminous with a radiance more than half divine.

Like a man beholding a vision, he fell back, “*God!*” she heard him mutter, beneath his breath.

That night Beatrice Vandee again kept vigil with her own soul, only this time there was no fighting against the truth!

Pretence, even self-deception, was no longer possible, for now she stood confessed before herself—and Paul! Fear had also gone out of her reckoning, for now she understood that, worthy or unworthy, he at least loved her, and all the woman in her exulted.



CHAPTER VIII

BUT the weeks passed, and tho she saw him, constantly, no allusion had been made to the revelations of the masked ball. Ever since that night there had been a new understanding between them, but no word had been spoken by him that should make her his before the world, and his silence, his strange restraint, perplexed and grieved her.

The hours were filled by dinners, dances, bridge, and the opera, but, as time sped on with her joy still unfulfilled, Beatrice began to droop like an exotic deprived of the sunshine.

At last the Lenten season came, bringing a lull in the social whirl, and one soft spring evening, as she sat alone in the twilight, the man of her dreams came to her with a look which startled her into sudden consciousness of some battle he had been waging within himself.

¶ He had come in so quietly she had not heard him till he stood before her, and in the dim light she could almost have fancied the white, drawn face belonged to a wraith, instead of being the living image of the man she loved.

“What is it—what has happened?” she cried, drawing him down beside her on the couch.

He tried to avoid her eyes. “Nothing new, only I am getting to see myself as others see me, and as I more and more clearly realize it all—God! I tell you, life isn’t fair—some are not given fair play!”

She leaned closer. “You are suffering, and it is all in the dark. Tell me—tell me what it is that troubles you—let me help you!”

He drew a hard breath, almost a groan, “I dare not.”

Hesitatingly, timidly, she took his hand in hers. “Can’t you trust me?” she reproached, her voice low and tender in its pleading. “You don’t deny that you suffer, that you are hiding something from me, and yet you will not let me help!”

He raised the clinging hands, and softly kissed them with lips she felt quiver. “Don’t —don’t ask me—I could not lie to you, but I dare not tell you!”

She strove to read in his face, what he held hidden. “Is it a sin, or a sorrow?” she whispered, with sudden intuition.

“Most sins *become* sorrows,” bitterly he replied.

A rush of hot tears blinded her, and at this he broke out, passionately,

“I would to God I could die! I am not fit to touch you! I have made you suffer, and now I realize, too late, that I have perhaps ruined your life’s happiness—you, the noblest woman ever born—a fitting return for all you have done for me! Why, you don’t know that, till I met *you*, I never even *realized* what I was, what I *had* been! I was *content* to be

so—I had become hardened in that mold. Then I knew you, and you *taught* me to be *ashamed*—you woke the sleeping soul in me!”

He flung off her touch as if it burned him, and stood before her with clenched hands. “But I tell you I never had a fair chance! *If* there is a God why are we not each given the same chances to be honest, and square?” ☛ ☛

She could no longer endure it. Rising, she held out both hands to him with a gesture of passionate compassion. “O, we are—we are!” she half sobbed, “Sooner, or later, God *does* give each soul its chance! Don’t you see that He may have sent *me* into *your* life to *help* you? O! if you have never before had your chance, try to believe that *I* am given to you for just this reason and, no matter what the past holds, *let me help* you to make the *future* perfect!”

He caught her hands, crushing them against his breast. “*Help me?*” he laughed wildly—“If you only knew! I tell you, if there is a God above us He will hold you *apart* from me—He will keep you safe from being drawn into the whirlpool of *my* life! Don’t you know it is *that* I am fighting against myself for—to *protect* you from the harm of contact with me? You could give me *no* help that would not bring *you* harm! Even such as I must stop at *that!*”

For an instant he faced her, white with impassioned despair, then, turning, left her standing alone in the shadows of the creeping night.





CHAPTER NINE

TWO weeks dragged wearily by for Beatrice. She had not seen Heath since he had come to her that last time in the spring twilight, and laid his soul bare before her.

He was reported to have left the city, no one having seen him about town, and her deep anxiety ate into her, as the days passed, empty of news of his whereabouts, and with no sign, nor message, from him.

¶ At last, unable to bear the strain any longer, and urged by Prosperity,—who was growing concerned over her failing health and spirits,—she accepted an invitation for a house party, and only a day or two intervened before their departure.

That afternoon they were due at the horse show, and she and her cousin were on their way there when they were held up by Dicky Hatch, who clambered into the tonneau beside them. “So nice to find friends going the same way,” he grinned, adding, “and I’ll reward you by a bit of news—the mysterious Heath has turned up again! I saw him on the street this morning, and they say he has put his name down for a private box at the show for this afternoon. Some folks say he hasn’t been out of town at all, just hiding away in his lair, communing with the spirits of darkness!”

Prosperity glanced uneasily at her cousin, who flushed hotly. “I detest gossip!” she cried, turning upon Dicky. “Especially when it concerns a personal friend of mine!”

Dicky muttered an apology, and subsided, looking so like a small boy, whose knuckles have been rapped, that Beatrice felt half inclined to laugh, in spite of her irritation. Nevertheless, her cheeks still burned when they reached their destination, and her eyes scanned the gay throng, eagerly in search of Paul, seeing nothing of the gay beauty of the brilliant scene before them, where high bred horses, and high bred women, exhibited their best paces in their best trappings.

Prosperity was borne off by one of her admirers to view the prize winners, and Beatrice joined a group discussing the merits of the two year olds on exhibit.

Suddenly she felt the strange, magnetic attraction which had so long ago first impelled her gaze, and, turning quickly, saw Heath making his way toward her.

“Will you come with me? I *must* speak to you,—and alone!” He drew her arm within his, without waiting for her assent, but he seemed to have forgotten her as he led her in silence thru the crowd, and she wondered, wistfully, at his abstraction, and apparent indifference.

¶ Suddenly he turned and met her gaze. “I have been fighting a battle with myself,”—answering the question in her eyes. “Some one

once said there was a devil, and an angel, within every man, and, when the devil wins, his angel makes him weep!"

As he spoke he opened the door of a private box, and drew her inside, dropping the curtains to screen them from view.

Then he went close to her, and she saw new lines graven about his mouth, and eyes, by the struggle he had confessed to. "All my life long I have taken whatever I desired, yet now, when I want *you* beyond all other things in heaven, or on earth, I am restrained by a strong hand! Ever since we parted, that last night, the fight has been on—God knows! I *meant* to leave you, then, forever, to prevent you from further suffering thru me! But, you see—I am here—I could *not* leave you even for your *own* good! All these days I have been fighting to *save you* from *myself*, and I can't! I tell you, *I can't*—I must have you!"

She clung to him, but he put her away—"Don't touch me! When I'm away from you I *realize* how criminal I am to let you come near me. I see myself as others see me, and I know I am condemned—a penniless beggar, and worse! But every hour that I stay away increases this mad, mad craving for you, until I am dragged back to you by a force beyond me—a power I cannot resist! Have you goaded the living devil in me, or roused the sleeping angel? God! when I see you, touch you, hear your voice, I can feel but one thing—my need of you, my need, my need!"

The light in her eyes shook him.

"Beatrice, if I *dared* take your love, would you grow to *hate* me for it, some day, if ever you should learn of a dishonorable past?"

¶ She drew close: "There is *no* past," she whispered, "Let us both forget we ever lived—till *now*!"

She raised her face to his, and let him read her most inmost soul. He trembled like an oak in the raging tempest, then, with an anguished moan—"God, forgive me!" he caught her to him, crushing her against him with a force that hurt, and devouring her lips with kisses.





CHAPTER X

DRIVING home in the sunset glow, Prosperity read the joy in her cousin's eyes, and stole her hand within hers. "Now you will know what it is to be happy," she whispered, "and you never have known that before!"

They had two engagements for that evening, but, late as it was, they found Heath waiting for them on their return.

"I heard you were to leave town," he began impetuously, as Beatrice followed him to their favorite inglenook within the wide chimney. "I couldn't wait till tomorrow to make sure—tell me it isn't true!"

¶ She sighed, "But it is! I never would have promised to go if I had known you really —wanted me!"

"Wanted you!" he echoed. "I have been wanting you all my miserable life—but, if I had known you, it would have never been such a life and yet, perhaps, some would say the basest act of all is in letting you make this sacrifice of yourself!"

She raised her hand to smooth away the deep lines that bit into his forehead. "Dear," she murmured, the deep joy in her welling into her voice like liquid music. "In this love of mine for you I have found the only great joy that I have ever known in life—isn't that enough?"

¶ "No—you don't understand, for, to a woman like you, love is an emotion of the soul—a purely spiritual ecstasy! But if you knew that I was unworthy of such devotion—if it was proven to you—could you forgive me for letting you share my stained name, and life?"

She smiled, and suddenly he realized what he had gained in winning such tenderness as hers. "Love is *perfected* by forgiveness! Let us forget there is anything in life *but* love, then, should ever a time come when the forgiveness is needed, *that shall follow!*"

He caressed her, in a passion of gratitude. "It makes me believe in a God just to know *you*—you don't even ask to hear of my past, or to what I allude—no other woman could take such a stand! Are you human, after all?"

She looked up at him, a light of mysticism in her eyes. "I used to be, very human, but now I may be different. I only know that love seems to me to be the recognition of the infinite in the finite, for, thru what I feel for you, I am able to more perfectly understand God's love, for us, because *I* would do, for *you*, all that He has done for mankind!"

¶ He did not reply—he appeared to be nerving himself to make some confession which cost him an effort.

"Beatrice, your trust, so superhuman in itself, makes me long to be at least as honest as I can be. I want to confess to you, that, before I met

you, I had vowed to marry you. I was a desperate man, then—I *had* to have money!”

She did not respond, and he felt her quiver in his arms. “ You know,” he faltered, “ you know how different it all has been with me since I really knew you—how you have changed me from brute beast to at least the semblance of a man—you *can’t* doubt my love *now?*”

She lifted her head from his shoulder and looked up into his face. “ I heard what you said in the conservatory, that night. I saw you first. It stung, then, but the hurt has all gone, now, because I love you so much I can no longer feel anything but gladness, and I believe, even if I knew you were marrying me for my money, I should not really mind it—I only seem to want to make you happy, and to give, give, *give!*”





CHAPTER XI

IT was half past seven, the following evening, when Miss Vandee and her cousin ascended the steps of the house where they were to dine. ¶ “Do wake up!” urged Prosperity, “you look miles away, with that dreamy look in your eyes! Try to forget Paul for the next few hours!” ¶ Beatrice laughed happily and quoted Burns:

“Ah! luve! luve! luve!
Luve is like a dizziness,
It winna let a puir body
Gang about his bizziness!”

“What makes you look so radiant tonight?” asked Dicky Hatch, as they went out to dinner!

“The gods have smiled on me!”

“That’s nothing new, they are always doing it—they spotted you long ago!”

She shook her head, “This is the first, real, *genuine* smile they have ever bestowed on me!”

Dicky grew curious. “Tell me about it.”

As if in reply to his demand for enlightenment, Paul’s name reached them, from the other end of the table, where their host was saying; “His is one of the most magnetic personalities I have ever come in touch with, and there seems to be no subject he is not conversant with. He has traveled far, read widely, and thought deeply on apparently every topic, and a more interesting companion would be hard to find. If I were a woman I should fall head over heels in love with him, in spite of the rumors that dog him!”

His wife smiled meaningly. “Perhaps we have,” she suggested, casting a teasing glance at Miss Vandee’s flushed face. A frown of wrath gathered on Reggy King’s brow. “He is a gambler and a black leg!” he burst out, with irrepressible vindictiveness.

An awful silence fell upon the entire table. The absolute savagery of the outbreak bereft each of their social instinct, the training and habit of years failing to suggest a remedy for such a brutal onslaught—such a bludgeon blow to every refinement of polite society.

Then, with a gasp, as of one recovering from the shock of a cold shower, the hostess plunged gallantly into the breach with some bit of irrelevant gossip, at which every one drew a long breath of relief, and exerted themselves to keep the conversational ball running smoothly in safer grooves.

No one was sorry, however, when the dinner was over, and rose with alacrity at the first signal from their hostess.

Prosperity was asked to play, and, later on, some one sang a melancholy ditty about "withered roses and frozen tears," but Beatrice, smarting still from the contretemps, and utterly jarred out of harmony, slipped away to a distant window seat, where she could be sheltered, by the heavy curtains, from the veiled glances of curiosity, or amusement, for which she felt herself a target.

She had not been long in her refuge, however, before the draperies were parted, and Reggy King stood beside her.

At sight of him all her suppressed fury burst into flame. "How do you *dare* come near me? Let me pass—I never wish to see, nor speak to you again!"

He whitened, "Since when has it become a criminal offense to repeat what rumor has declared to be truth about Paul Heath—and since when has it become a personal matter to *you* that you should resent it like this?"

She ignored his sneering tone, and words, striving to pass him. "By what right do you detain me here, against my will?" she demanded, haughtily facing him, as she found herself unable to force a way past him.

The hot blood leaped within him, and he pressed closer to her, his breath scorching her, as it swept across her cheek. "By the right of my love for you," passionately, "by the right of my long and patient waiting—my faithful serving of your slightest wish! You have played with me long enough, and I will *not* have your name coupled with that blackguard's any longer—now it is time I spoke, and you *shall* hear me, for I love you, Beatrice Vandee, and I swear I will make you my wife, or—"

"Be still—Don't you *dare* say one more word! Let me pass, I tell you, let me pass!"

She beat upon his breast with both hands, in a frenzied effort to escape the hateful presence, but he seized them in his own. "You *shall* listen to my love, and answer it—you shall *not* be associated with a scoundrel who—"

She wrenched her hands free by one last, frantic effort. "I hate you!" she panted, low and tense, "and *I am to be Paul Heath's wife!*"

¶ He fell back, as if her words had struck him a staggering blow, gazing, half stupefied, into her flashing eyes. Then she turned and left him, holding her head high as she swept across the room to Prosperity's side.

¶ He stood behind the curtains where she had left him, staring defeat in the face, then, as the realization of Heath's triumph dawned full upon him, he ground his teeth together in a fury of baffled hate. "*Damn him!*" he muttered beneath his breath, "*Damn him—I'll spoil his game yet!*"



CHAPTER XII

THE next morning every one was early astir, and when Paul arrived he found himself in the midst of the confusion attendant upon departure.

Beatrice came to him, gowned in her traveling dress, uttering a little cry of dismay as she saw his face. "Oh, don't look like that. I'm not going to be away long—not really long enough for you to miss me!" He smiled at her words—"Miss you!" he reiterated, in a tone expressive of such yearning, that she felt her heart tighten with a sudden strange, premonitory warning, that, in her absence, he would have deep need of her.

"Oh, I'd give anything to get out of going!" she cried, "why did I ever promise?"

He grew remorseful. "I'm a brute to spoil the pleasure of your trip by my own selfish whinings, especially when you go wearing this symbol of our acknowledged love, and complete oneness, to show all men you are mine!"

As he spoke, he slipped a circlet of opals and diamonds upon her finger, sealing the act with a kiss.

She gazed at the ring with happy eyes saying, with a little laugh, "It's positively disgraceful for a woman to be so openly delighted because she is engaged, isn't it!"

He looked down at her, wistfully regarding her pleasure, then, suddenly—"Beatrice, give me your promise not to let anything, nor anybody, come between us—no matter what you may hear of me!"

Something in his voice caught her attention, and she looked up at him, responding to the dread in his face, with a silent, but passionate caress. He held her close—"It would kill me to lose your faith in me!" he breathed, in overmastering emotion, "and I swear to you, before God, I will yet live to *deserve* your trust!"

It was a tiresome journey, for an accident, ahead of them, delayed their train, so that they reached their destination late in the evening, and too exhausted to ask for anything but a chance to rest.

Miss Evans, their hostess, a pretty, fair haired little woman, had them shown at once to their rooms, where she joined them later, talking volubly, as was her wont. "I have had to send for Dicky Hatch—one simply has to have him at a house party, he keeps things from getting moped, and acts as a sort of court jester. And I have two new men whom you have never met—one is a rich Chicagoan, whose real name is John Potter, tho no one ever calls him anything but 'Jack Pot'—I suppose he plays the stiffest games of bridge, and poker, that his club allows—and the other is an Englishman—Walter Summers—an

honorable with a whole cemetery of dead Earls back of him, and next in line to his brother for promotion. I have picked *him* out for *you*!" she added, glancing at Beatrice, who, flushing consciously, looked down at the new ring upon her finger.

Miss Evans followed her glance. "Why Beatrice Vandee! Have you actually surrendered, at *last*? Tell me this instant who he is! I'd just like to know how long this has all been going on that *I* have never even heard of what happened!"

"It has *just* 'happened,' and his name is Paul Heath." Beatrice pronounced his name hesitatingly, dreading the usual lifted brows, but evidently Miss Evans had never before heard of him, for she made no comment whatever upon the name.

"I only wish I had known about it in time to ask him down here with you—now it's too late, as every room in the house is full, but do tell me what he is like, and Oh! now you can't marry my Englishman!"

¶ Beatrice laughed, "It would have taken two to make that bargain, anyway, and the gentleman 'in line for promotion' *might* have had objections!"

But Miss Evans was examining the engagement ring, to the exclusion of all other interests. "It's a gem—but are you not *awfully* risky to wear *opals* for such a symbol?"

Beatrice shook her head. "Superstition is for the *unhappy*, and I can never be that again—now!"

Miss Evans gasped—"For heaven's sake, you rash girl, rap on wood to take off the curse of such a reckless defiance of Fate! The biblical injunction to 'let him who thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall' is applicable to the poor mortal who brags of happiness—luck is not in it!"

Then, seeing Prosperity repress a yawn, she recollected her other guests, and rose to take her leave.

"I left them all busy at bridge, so they won't know how long I have been up here, neglecting them, and I told them to make hay while the sun shone, because, after you came there would be no bridge! It is such a relief to have any excuse to give one a rest from that game—positively, the rage for it has converted social life into a '*bridge of sighs*'—and with the *debtor's prison* at the *other end*!"

With a jolly little chuckle she kissed them both good night, and whisked out.

Prosperity drew a deep breath. "Does she always talk so fast?"

¶ Beatrice nodded. "I like it, for it is such a lazy way of conversing—one only has to punctuate what she says by nods, and smiles, while they calmly pursue the even tenor of their own thoughts, and she is, after all, such a good sort!"



CHAPTER XIII

HELLO, Dicky! where did you drop from?"

Dicky Hatch sprang thru the window of the library, where the entire party was gathered in a vain endeavor to forget the torrid heat outside, and his sudden advent was hailed with delight, as being a diversion. ¶ He was in the highest spirits. He said they always mounted with the mercury, which explained his being in such a demand at house parties, and picnics. He had even walked up from the station, not having notified his hostess of the time of his arrival so so

He helped himself liberally to the iced julep, chattering on as he sipped luxuriously thru his straw. "The old town is empty—so empty a fellow fairly rattles around in it, but the few who are left are all alive over the fact that Paul Heath is to be congratulated!"

Beatrice raised her head with a lift of inimitable pride—"Why not congratulate me, too?" she asked, a challenge in her voice.

Dicky fidgeted, "Oh! of course—yes—only Heath is so deucedly lucky to win out ahead of all of the rest of us, don't you know," and he hurried on to less dangerous ground, retailing the latest shreds of gossip, as he sat cross-legged on a pile of cushions.

"The Daruells are up in the divorce court!" he finally announced, and his news was received with a burst of comment, and ejaculation.

"Why it was only last winter they were married," exclaimed Miss Evans and they were mad about each other—they quarreled with both their families because hers was poor and proud, and his was rich and vulgar—so that neither faction approved of the tie up!"

Dicky nodded, in answer to Miss Evans' outburst, "Too true—but, now he charges her with 'wanton extravagance,' and she counter-charges 'brutal behavior, unbecoming a gentleman'—so there you have it!"

"Moral—never insist on getting your own way—people don't really know what it is they *do* want, anyhow!" asserted Prosperity. "When I was a little girl I was wild to possess a bumble bee that haunted the roses on our porch climber. It was a beauty, striped yellow and black, and I was fascinated. Of course, I was forbidden to touch it, and warned of the consequences if I did, but that only made me the more determined, so I watched my chance and seized it while it was sucking the sweetness out of a big red rose! Naturally I got what was coming to me, but at least I learned my lesson, and, after that, I occasionally believed, and heeded, what wiser heads asserted and advised."

Miss Evans sighed. "We all want to be happy, and in our own way, yet an old lady once told me that she had lived to give thanks for every

unanswered prayer—which proves the moral of your bumble bee tale,” nodding over at Prosperity.

Beatrice looked up. “*I* would rather *have* my bee, sting and all, than to go thru life forever being denied!”

Every one laughed, while the dressing bell joined in, as if in added applause ☪ ☪

“After dinner,” Miss Evans announced, “I shall call a meeting to discuss an all day picnic for tomorrow—now that Dicky has come we must do something to amuse the infant!”

Dicky waved his handkerchief as a banner of triumph in acknowledgment of such a tribute to his age, sex, and personality, but his usually merry face looked sobered enough as he followed in the wake of the gay crowd, scattering to their separate apartments to dress for dinner, and he managed to detain Prosperity a moment as she was about to enter her own room.

“Tell me—is it a settled fact—this engagement rumored between Heath, and your cousin?”

The girl looked up at him in quick anxiety. “Yes, Oh yes, and she loves him *frightfully*. Don’t tell me there is anything to come between them? It would just kill her to have to give him up, now!”

Dicky looked still more troubled. “Gad—women are the devil for getting themselves into hot water! Why couldn’t she have liked something less harmful? Lord knows, we have *all* been on our knees to her, for years, and not one of *us* would have put her thru the thorny paths that this chap is bound to get her mixed up in!”

Prosperity paled—“Oh, you frighten me so—tell me, what has happened?” ☪ ☪

“Only that he has been seen in close confab with the dirtiest of scoundrels! Fact is, I myself saw him talking to the wretch.”

She looked relieved. “Is that all? Why, that’s just nothing at all—he was probably stopped by some beggar who wanted money!”

But Dicky looked unconvinced, shaking his head dubiously as he went on to his room further down the hall.

That night, when Prosperity went into her cousin’s room, for her usual good night kiss, she found her kneeling at the window, her long hair falling about her white robed figure like night, enfolding day, and a strained look in the pale face raised to receive the usual caress ☪

“What is it?” the girl questioned, answering the trouble she saw.

¶ Beatrice rested her head against the loving arm about her neck, “Paul,” she whispered, “I am filled with dread—*something* is threatening him—some harm has come to him, I feel it; I know it; it has haunted me for days! Oh, I wish I had never left him! He needs me, and I am not near!”

Prosperity laughed, tho Dicky’s words came back to her with redoubled force, making her fond heart ache with a new dread for her cousin’s happiness. “You are in love!” she teased, forcing herself into jesting. “Who would have believed Miss Vandee, the proud, the cold, the unapproachable, to be guilty of the moon-gazing sentimentality of a

school girl! Goosie—your fears are only the symptoms of being in love—every girl fancies something may happen to the one most important male creature in the world—it's just their foolish way of loving! There is nothing the matter with your Paul, honey, he is probably at the club, this minute, playing bridge, telling naughty stories, and having a good old time hobnobbing with the other men over their cigars—he would only laugh at your worries!”

But Beatrice shook her head, unbelieving, and, long after her cousin had left her, she lay awake, wrestling with the intangible misery that enveloped her as the creeping mists of night will arise, shrouding the world in a ghostly pall of chill!





CHAPTER XIV

THE next morning dawned clear and cool, and every one seemed to reflect the sunshine, as they gathered about the breakfast table *so so*

Prosperity breathed a sigh of relief as she noted the bright eyes, and pink cheeks of her cousin, who looked as if she had never known a worry or a care. Beatrice nodded across the flowers at her. "I'm drunk," she laughed, "I got up at six and took a walk, and the morning air was like wine, there never was such a day! I'm glad we are going to spend every minute out in it."

"Jack Pot" stifled a yawn. "The day is very young yet," he suggested *so so*

Miss Evans shook her head at him.

"Don't croak about possible storms when the gods offer such sunshine as this. It's enough to make them retract the blessing to have it fall on such ungrateful heads, and *do* wake up—you look like a set of sleepy martyrs!"

Dicky glanced round. "I think we look like a 'sunshine circle'; every one is in the most delightfully sunny mood, and any hostess who can dish up such a cheerful lot of guests, at *breakfast*, ought not to preach to others of ingratitude of the gods!"

She laughed, "I retract, only none of you seem to be much interested in the picnic, except Beatrice, and I do want this to be jolly—a real, old fashioned day in the woods!"

Dicky asserted his thirst for adventure, and the others woke up to the requirements of the occasion, so that it was a very merry crowd that was at last stowed away in the big, old fashioned picnic wagon. The wraps, lunch, cushions and hammocks being packed into the cart which was to follow with the servants, the roads being too poor to allow of motoring. ¶ The horses were fresh, and pranced along, sniffing the air and tossing their heads as if they, too, felt the spirit of the day.

¶ Beatrice watched them with the true horse lover's keen appreciation. "I'm so glad you stick to flesh, instead of following the world's mad rush for gasoline," she said to Miss Evans. "I tried to, but in a city it's different. I finally succumbed to the inevitable auto."

They passed a farm house, and two yellow curs dashed out upon them, barking frantically, making the horses shy and curvet. Dicky looked scared, and every one laughed. "I don't care," he defended himself, "you can't count on a nag—give me a steady old machine." But he was drowned out by a shout of contradiction, and pelted by anecdotes of automobile horrors, until he subsided to a mere animated grin of good nature.



Every one felt too thoroughly in tune with the charm of the weather to quarrel upon any subject, and their laughter and singing brought out the inhabitants of the farms all along their way.

They had still a couple of hours before noon, when they at last reached their destination, which they spent exploring the natural cave, and neighboring wood.

Wild flowers grew in abundance, and, with the city dwellers' delight over nature's productions at first hand, they revelled in the blossoms, making great bouquets of pink lipped wild roses, and twining the long stemmed violets into garlands. This finally ended in a flower fight, which proved so amusing and novel a way of killing time, that it was with a start of dismay Miss Evans at last glanced at her watch to find it long past the luncheon hour, and still no signs of lunch.

She said nothing, but slipped away to gaze, long and anxiously, down the road along which the cart should come, and Dicky, observing, ventured to suggest that maybe she had ordered lunch "served in the dining car."

At this, every one's tongue became loosed, while every one confessed to being utterly starved, and every one openly wailed for food.

It was nearly two, and the fresh air and exercise had produced a truly abnormal appetite in each individual, still no lunch appeared; no sound of hoofs, no clatter of wheels, broke the majestic silence of the woods  

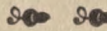

Dicky looked reproach, "How could you play such a joke on us?"

¶ Miss Evans choked, hysterically, "It isn't a joke—do you suppose I have the remotest idea of what has become of that wretched lunch?"

¶ A groan went up—what could be done?

Each suggested something, but nothing that was helpful, until Summers proposed dispatching the coachman, on one of the horses, to ascertain what had become of the cart and its contents.

Miss Evans grasped at the idea, and the man was sent off on his errand at once, with orders not to return until he had found the lost luncheon.

¶ Then they sat down and waited. They waited till even the most cheerful lost countenance, and Dicky wailed—"Now *this* is what comes of depending on horses!" But no one had the spirit left for any argument  

"Jack Pot" was thoughtful, and, finally, came out with the announcement that he would never again refuse even a tramp if it felt like this to be hungry.

Prosperity said she wished she was a bird, for there seemed to be plenty of bugs, and worms, to eat, and Summers said he had had a great-grandfather who ate snakes, insisting that they were as good as frog's legs, or eels, as a food!

Dicky vowed he would come to snakes himself if help was not near at hand, and Miss Evans suddenly startled them all by breaking into a flood of tears.

"It's so horrible," she sobbed. "Here I've got you all, and nothing to eat, and I know you hate me, and I wanted it to be so nice and jolly,

and I don't know where that lunch is, and I don't know where anything is, and I don't see what I'm to do, or how we're ever to get home or any—anything!"

Of course, every one was immediately apologetic. They had only grumbled for the fun of it—really they enjoyed the joke of it all, and it certainly was a lark never to be forgotten. But she continued to weep until Summers, whose English blood, revolting at any display of feelings, had drawn him out of ear-shot, down the lane towards the road, at last saw the coachman returning at a mad gallop. His shout attracted attention, and every one sprang to meet the horseman as he pelted into their midst, his face crimson with his exertions, and the effort he had made to preserve, intact, the contents of the huge hamper he carried on his left arm.

"John got run into," he explained, breathlessly. "The cart was busted, so he couldn't come along any more, so I brung one basket of the lunch!"

No one waited for manners; not even a cloth was spread, for man, hungry and primitive, demanded satisfaction, and silence reigned while the first edge of appetite was being blunted. Then Dicky, with a sandwich in each hand, paused long enough to give utterance to a long drawn sigh of deepest satisfaction, "My!" was all he said, but a smile of answering comprehension went around the circle.

So engrossed had they all been that no one noticed the overclouding skies until a huge rain drop splashed upon "Jack Pot's" hand, and he raised a cry of alarm as he pointed out the darkening heavens.

Consternation prevailed, and every one made for the coach, the men doing their best to assist the coachman in harnessing, and to button down the curtains, while the rain began to pelt upon them in good earnest ☼ ☼

"O, what an awful picnic," wailed Miss Evans, "I feel like apologizing to every one of you!"

A simultaneous clap of thunder, and vivid lightning flash, drowned her words, and Dicky cried, "Never mind, if we ever get home alive we'll forgive you!"

Half soaked as they were, the men scrambled to their seats, and at last they were off on their mad race with the storm. On and on they went, the horses plunging frantically at each fresh thunder clap, and forked tongue of fire; crashing thru the underbrush of a short cut home—which they had chosen for themselves, with the bits between their teeth ☼ ☼

The coachman, tugging helplessly at the reins, swore fiercely as he realized his powerlessness, and the danger to all in that swaying coach, inside of which the picnickers sat, white faced and silent, not knowing at what moment they might be overturned, and crushed into a mangled mass of quivering flesh.

A strange feeling of suffocation stole over Beatrice, dulling even her terror, and sense of danger. Never had she felt anything like it; her heart seemed to contract, as if in the grasp of some human hand, and

her breath failed her as tho it was being sucked from her by some horrible beast of prey. It came to her that this was death, and an inarticulate prayer sped upwards that she might be spared for Paul's sake. Then there came a sudden jolt, as if the coach had struck some huge object too large to pass over—there was a wrench, a crash, a curse from the coachman, and a cry of relief from Miss Evans, "O, it's the lodge gate, thank God we are home!"

They had run into the wall. The horses had ripped their harness like cobwebs, and made off for the stables, but at least no one was hurt, and they were at last home, and near shelter.

Beatrice felt herself half led, half carried, into the great hall, where a bright fire burned in the big fireplace, and then, without warning, she startled them all by slipping to the floor where she crouched, white lipped, and moaning in dumb agony.

Dicky ran for whisky, while Summers raised her in his arms and carried her to her room, followed by Prosperity, whose face was as white as her cousin's ☹ ☹

It seemed an endless time before the hastily summoned doctor at last arrived, and administered medicine, which eased the pain, and sent the patient off into restful unconsciousness.

Miss Evans followed him from the room, "What is it?" she asked, breathlessly ☹ ☹

• "Organic heart trouble; valvular," he replied, with professional brevity ☹ ☹

She looked her skepticism. "I don't see how that could be—I've known Miss Vandee all her life, and she has never been known to have any such tendency; she never even faints!"

The doctor scowled at her, "I never fail in my diagnoses! She has organic heart disease, and if she has failed to show it, up to this time, it is due to her having led a life free from emotions, or shocks of any kind, but the fright she tonight experienced produced the inevitable effects! Any great grief, or strain, will likely prove fatal."

Tears gathered in Miss Evan's eyes. "Shall you—do you want any one to tell her?"

He shook his head, "It would only do her harm—besides, given a calm, and unexciting existence, she might live to any age, one never can tell in such cases!"

The waiting group about the fire looked shocked at the news; to have one in their midst so claimed by Death seemed too horribly incongruous in contrast to their lives of pleasure. How could such a thing be real in the very center of their little gay world of sparkling life?

¶ Dicky looked especially sobered. "I'm afraid it's a bad thing for her to be engaged to Heath," he whispered to Prosperity. "She's sure to get some sort of a shock thru him!"



CHAPTER XV

THE day previous to the "accidental picnic," (as Dicky had labeled the event) Paul Heath sat at the Club, trying to forget his loneliness in a magazine article upon the subject of socialism, but, tho hot enough in radicalism, the sentences fell upon his mind like dried autumn leaves, blowing lightly from the surface before the counter currents that swept his thoughts.

Never in all his life before had he known what it was to be homesick, but now his very soul seemed to be devoured by a hunger and thirst for Beatrice—a sort of spiritual craving—a yearning of all that was best in him for that atmosphere in which she always enveloped him, and which was so new to his experience that, in her absence, he half doubted its reality, tho the half doubt only added to his passionate longing to once more revel in the fact of such exquisite joy.

"Egad, Heath, I thought I was the only male survivor! How is it you are not dipping into the ocean, or drinking mountain breezes?"

¶ Paul frowned, loneliness was bad enough, but at least it left him free to think of all he longed for, and silence spoke of Beatrice.

"I am awaiting Miss Vandee's return to pay a visit with her, and her cousin, in the mountains."


The red faced intruder grinned, "Sure—you're the lucky winner of that matrimonial prize; Jove! you are to be congratulated, half the men in town have been angling there!"

Paul flung down his magazine, and rose.

"What—going? Why man, I was just getting started on a most interesting subject," but Heath left him with only a nod of farewell. Outside, the air was furnace hot, and he wandered toward the Park in a half unconscious desire for coolness and quiet.

Seating himself upon one of the rustic benches in a secluded corner, he drew forth the last letter he had received from Beatrice, and, rereading it with all the eagerness of a first perusal, he failed to hear the approaching footsteps of a burly man until that bulky form stood before him, casting a black shadow upon the sheet he read. Then he glanced up, and sprang to his feet with a cry of horror.

"Briggs—John Briggs!" His lips seemed stiffened, so that utterance almost failed him, and his dark eyes burned in his ashen face like live coals holding hidden fires.

The man grinned, showing yellowed teeth, sharp and uneven as the fangs of a wolf. "I'm glad you remember me so well, for I've dogged you many a day to recall the close bond of friendship between us. We have been separated so long I almost began to fear you might forget the—" 

"Damn you—hush!" cried Heath, in a voice of concentrated fury, glancing about in the gathering dusk.

"O, no fear of listeners here, only walls have ears! That's why I chose to tackle you in the open—considerate of me, wasn't it, to try to shield your fair name?"

Paul assured himself that no one was near either to see, or to listen, and then, going so close to the man that their shoulders touched, he whispered hoarsely, half in demand, half pleading—"Drop it, I swear to you I have not one cent! I have not played for months!"

¶ A sneer answered him. "Do you suppose I don't know that? I've been onto you with both feet, and I want to say, right here, that I'm proud of you, boy! I didn't dream I was dealing in such good material when I first began work with you! If I had, I'd have kept a tighter grip on the halter. Jove, play? *I* never played for such stakes, in *my* life, as the game *you're* putting up, *now*. Beauty, innocence, purity, wealth, maybe even a heart,—all on the green cloth, the biggest gamble a man can make!"

Paul turned away, sickened by the truth in what he said. "O, the *end*," he muttered to himself, "If I could only have seen *this end* at the *beginning*!" ☞ ☞

His tormentor laughed shortly. "Come — no more of this — I've spent my last cent waiting for you to be a happy bridegroom, now I've got to have a little ready cash to carry me along till that event takes place. No use in crying off, you can borrow *any* money on your prospects, and it's *that* or — by God, man—I'll *peach* on you, I swear it, and—"

Paul's iron grip at his throat choked his words into a gurgling gasp for breath. "I'll kill you, you snake, I'll crush the cursed breath out of you!" ☞ ☞

Locked in a deadly embrace they swayed back and forth, till a heavy blow from Briggs stunned Heath, who loosened his grip in an effort to keep himself from being borne to the ground. Taking advantage of this momentary weakness, Briggs placed the iron seat between them, glaring across it as he cried, "You fool—can't you see your only chance is to give me what I ask? Have you forgotten those papers that I hold?"

¶ Paul fell back as tho pierced by his death blow—the *papers*—he had thought them burned, years ago! In one despairing moment he saw his utter helplessness! Only two things were possible, with that proof in Briggs' possession—to face ruin—or buy silence! The first would mean to lose Beatrice—the very soul of him. The *second*? Would he be able to keep her love with such a secret between them—with Briggs' constant demands gnawing thru their union?

"Come," mockingly triumphant, "hand over the little eagles. The Lord loveth a *cheerful* giver, and I'll let you off easy this time, out of pure friendliness."

The calm insolence stung Paul into sudden revolt. "Not a cent," he flung back, "not one penny—not now, not ever—so help me God!"

¶ The black brow darkened. "You realize you are signing your death

warrant, so to speak? You understand that I can present my proofs at any time—and the consequences?”

Paul winced. “You’ll lose your own liberty, by doing so; you can’t betray me without equally implicating yourself!”

Briggs laughed, a bitter snarl of sound. “I’m told the Pen furnishes both better food, and better clothes, than *I* shall have if you don’t fork over—so why should I mind losing a little of my hungry, penniless liberty? You see *I* have nothing at stake, while you, my friend, have everything to lose—all that golden wealth, and the beauty of woman, and such faith, and love, as only creatures like that can lavish on a man, so—”

With the cry of a wild beast, tortured to its death, Paul vaulted the iron seat between them, and flung himself upon the other with such unpent fury that the heavy form fell, as an oak goes down before the onslaught of a tempest.

Paul’s wild cry had echoed on the still air, and now he heard footsteps running rapidly toward the spot. In desperation he dashed into the shrubberies behind him, and made his escape under cover of the fast gathering dusk.

The steps drew nearer till a tall, slight young man came to a standstill beside the prostrate form. “What the devil—a murder, or suicide, or just a man in a fit?”

He poked the body with the toe of an immaculate patent leather shoe, till Briggs moaned, and opened his eyes.

“Not dead, anyway. Sick?” he asked.

Slowly the burly figure gathered itself together, and sat up, eyes peering into the shadows, then, as it dawned upon Briggs that Heath had escaped him, he broke out into violent curses.

At the name of Paul Heath, the young man became suddenly alert. “What do you know about *him*?” he demanded.

The eager question put Briggs on his guard. “None of your business,” he answered, shortly, and rose heavily to his feet.

Reggy drew a roll of bills from his pocket and held them, temptingly, before the other’s greedy eyes. “I’ll give you these if you will tell me all you know of Heath.”

Briggs gazed gloatingly at the fluttering bits of green scrip. He peered keenly into Reggy’s face, weighing the prudence of trusting him with his secret. The bills rustled alluringly in the evening breeze. He counted them—tens and fives—nearly a hundred—it was impossible to turn down all that.

“I know enough to put him away, safe in the Pen, for years—a good long term if you want to get him out of the way!” he at last admitted, with the caution of cunning.

Reggy’s face leaped into sudden flame. “Hell!” he broke out, then, as if doubting such luck, he pressed on: “You’re not lying to me—it won’t turn out to be a bit of blackmail, or such rot?”

Briggs smiled, “Hardly, I have *written proofs*!”

The devil leaped into full sized life in Reggy’s eyes, as he went close

to the other: "I will give you twenty-five thousand dollars, in cold cash, if you will *show that proof* to the girl he is engaged to!"

Briggs wet his lips like a hungry beast who smells meat. "How'll I know you'll keep your bargain?"

"By the *hate* I bear Paul Heath," was the answer, and he knew his reward was certain.

"Done!" he agreed, as his fingers closed upon the bills held out to him, and they parted, agreeing where to meet when the deed was accomplished. ••

Reggy King walked on air as he made his way to his rooms, a smile of exultant triumph on his lips. "Damned adventurer, he will bite the dust, and she, the proud Beatrice, how she will suffer when she sees what it is she has given herself to! Then, when her pride is crumbled to the earth, I shall step in, and, after that, comes my reward—and my revenge upon her for the past!"





CHAPTER XVI

IT WAS the evening of the second day after the picnic, which had had so nearly fatal an ending, and Beatrice declared she was well enough to rejoin the party downstairs.

Every one received her as if she was set aside as an article too fragile for anything but the tenderest handling, for the mark of a possibly early death, which she so unconsciously bore, gave them a certain sense of awe in her presence.

She vaguely felt the change in their manner to her, and laughingly declared that now she was as good as ever, as good as any of them, and she refused to be labeled "handle with care!"

The picnic was a tabooed subject, both out of consideration for herself, as having been the cause of her illness, and also because Miss Evans still felt sensitive about its tragic failure.

Dicky irrepressibly referred to it, once, as a "pleasure exertion," but no notice was taken of him, and he subsided.

It was an oppressively warm evening, and every one felt more inclined to dawdle about in hammocks, on the broad verandas, than to amuse themselves indoors, and for once the usually silent Englishman was beguiled into talking of life abroad. A discussion of the difference between English and American customs followed, but died a natural death from sheer lack of the energy required for argument.

At last some one asked Beatrice if she had written Heath about her illness, and she had scoffed at the idea of alarming him so needlessly.

¶ "Do you know, everything you say of Heath reminds me of a chap I knew in Chicago," Jack Potter said. "He was the most utterly magnetic fellow I ever met, he could work a spell over a wooden image, and charm a Chinese idol! He was as mysterious as to his history as if he was a new born baby, and seemed to be a veritable bird of passage, with no home, and no settled abiding place."

"What became of him?" some one idly questioned.

"O, he vanished as he came—a meteor! They say he was caught in a card trick, but I was away at the time so can't vouch for it, and I don't want to believe it, for I liked the fellow, there was always something fine in him."

An awkward silence followed his words.

Beatrice felt that others were comparing the dark rumors, concerning Heath, to Potter's story, and the consciousness of alien sympathies oppressed her. She pressed her last letter from him closer to the heart on which it lay, yearning to defend him; to make others know him as she had learned to do; but the uselessness of the effort kept her silent. A great longing to see him, to be in his arms once more, possessed her,

and, obeying the restlessness of her mood, she slipped away from them all, and wandered deep into the shadows of the garden.

The flowers slept under their silver coverlet of moonbeams, lulled into drowsy content by the cradling breezes. Further and further she strayed from the house into the fairy realms of the summer's dreaming night, till the voices and laughter grew faint in the distance, and she and her heart were alone beneath the stars.

As always, when deeply stirred by the beauty of nature, or by some exquisite poem or melody, Paul seemed to be with her, drawn into her innermost being by a subtle, spiritual comprehension; mutual, but mute. So, now, she was scarcely surprised to behold him dimly outlined before her in the moonlight.

"I have been watching for you, hoping for just this chance; did you hear my heart calling you to come out?" he whispered, drawing her to him *so so*

She yielded to his embrace like a happy child seeking longed for comfort. "You are so close, in my inmost self, that I should never be surprised to see you, no matter how far away I might have thought you were. It seems natural to have you appear, as if in response to my need of you!"

"Need?" he questioned, quickly, "what need had *you*; has anything gone wrong?"

She smiled; "Must things 'go wrong' for a woman to feel a *need* for what she wants above everything on earth?"

A look of relief lightened his face, but her next words brought back the strained fear which it had been too dark for her to read in his eyes.

"I *have* been foolish about you, tho—last week I was almost on the verge of rushing back to the city, for I felt as if you were in some sort of trouble, and I could not shake off the feeling! I haven't been very well, for the last few days, and I fancy that was what made me worry over you—but it is just that much more blessed to *see* you, now, and hold you safe, like this! What good angel sent you to me?"

He drew her closer, with a sort of savage force. "I couldn't stand it, that's all—I had to see you! Dear, I don't seem to even know myself when you are away from me! This new person you have made of me is too much of a stranger for me to feel at home with, and the old Paul, (that you have annihilated) has a ghostly way of haunting my waking hours, which drives me to seeking you as the only spell which can exorcise the ghoul! I came down here tonight just to see you, even if it was only for a moment's glimpse in the distance!"

She looked up, surprised. "But you are coming in; you will at least spend the evening with us all?"

He was silent, and she drew away to look up into his face. "Something *is* wrong, but it is with *you*! Oh, I knew it—I felt it—and now I see it in your face! What is it—what is troubling you?"

But he forced a laugh, which sounded so genuine she was half deceived.

"I dare say new lines have been cutting into my face. Didn't I tell you what it meant to me to have you away? I grow old in your absence."

¶ He returned her gaze, steadily, solemnly—"Beatrice, I swear to you that all I want on earth, or in heaven, is your love, your *faith*, and my only fear—the only harm that could threaten me—is the danger of *losing you*! Nothing else could move me but that—except the horror of bringing pain, or grief, to you! You are my world, my life, here—my only possible hope for life hereafter, and to have you mine, to keep safe from harm thru me, is my one and only prayer—the first I have ever offered to the God above us!"

His passion thrilled her strangely, feeling, as she did, the unseen, unguessed undercurrent sweeping like a deadly undertow beneath the surface meaning of his words. Forgetting all else she clung to him. "I am yours—for life—thru death—not even God could separate us, now!" *so so*

He strained her to him, and a silence too full for utterance wrapt them, broken rudely in upon by the stealthy crackling of twigs in the underbrush. In an instant Paul's hand had sought his hip pocket, and Beatrice saw a small weapon glitter in the moonlight as he faced about towards the sound.

Amazement held her, then she laid her fingers on his arm. "What is the matter? It's only Diogenese, the big dane. He always follows me when I go for a walk."

With a sharp breath of relief, he dropped the tiny toy back into his pocket, but Beatrice was troubled. "Dear, what makes you so easily startled, and why do you carry that pistol? It worries me!"

He tried to laugh easily. "Oh, I confess to being nervous, but I was sandbagged once, and I dare say it's made a coward of me, so I always carry this little fellow in my hip pocket when I expect to be out nights, and any suspicious noise puts me on guard. Forgive me for startling you so, and I apologize to your friend, Diogenese, for treating him as a suspicious character.

The big dane poked his wet nose confidingly into his outstretched hand, as if in gracious acceptance of this explanation, but Beatrice was not satisfied. Seeing that he wished to close the subject, however, she said nothing more, but turned away towards the house. "We must be going back, or they will be getting anxious over me." Then she stopped, seeing that he did not follow her.

"Forgive me—but—I—I can't go up there with you!"

She turned and faced him. "Not go up to the house—why—what did you come for—all this way?"

"Just for this possible chance of a glimpse of you. I'm going to walk across lots to the railroad, the way I came, and catch the midnight train back to town!"

A slight note of bitterness edged her voice as she said, "More mystery! May I ask *why* you can't return with me to the house?"

He caught the tone, and the misery in his face melted her. "I'm the curse of your life!" he muttered.

She was back in his arms, begging forgiveness with mute caresses. "Just tell me the reason, that's all I ask," she pleaded.

He looked down at her; then, setting his teeth, he said, "There is a man staying there whom I—I don't care to meet—Oh—heart of my heart, try to trust me! I know I ask what only a woman such as you could be big enough to give. I confess that I don't deserve it, but still I beg it—trust me—trust me!"

A low sigh fluttered from her lips, as tho her heart was sobbing to itself. He took her face between his hands, "Is it too much?"

Voices, calling imperatively, warned them that Beatrice had been missed, and was being searched for. She roused herself from the depression which had suddenly seemed to engulf her, and, slipping both arms about Paul's neck, drew his head down to hers as she whispered, "My love is yours, and with that goes all that I am! Never doubt my trust, my faith, come good or ill. I am yours wholly, and forever!"

¶ He crushed her to him, and the next moment was gone, leaving her, shaken and trembling, to retrace her steps to the house with whatever explanation she could concoct to deceive them all regarding her long absence from their midst.





CHAPTER XVII

THE week that followed Beatrice spent as one in a dream. That some strange, sad past enveloped Paul, as in the shadow of a bygone darkness, she could not doubt, and tho her love battled against the rumors which cast a cloud of dishonor upon him, she was too clear visioned not to be forced into the tacit belief that the storms had been of his own fault—that possibly shame would lie in their unveiling! Nevertheless, love was triumphant, and as she and Prosperity were whirled back to the city and Paul, her heart throbbed with the ecstasy of reunion.

What did anything matter compared to this wonderful joy of loving, of giving? If Paul's past was dark, at least his future should be bright! If sin had stained those bygone years, the years to come should atone, and she, by the purity of her love, would wipe away the memory!

He met them at the station, and the eager rapture of his greeting was wine to her soul.

Prosperity considerably left them alone, when they reached the house, but he did not stay long, as it was late, and their start the next morning was to be an early one.

"I shall never let you go out of my sight again," he said, at parting.

"I not only lose *you*, but I lose *myself*! I was reading over my favorite poem of Browning's, last night, till it seemed as if he must have been writing about you." and he quoted, vibrantly:

" "But give them me—the mouth, the eyes, the brow!
Let them once more absorb me! One look, now,
Would wrap me round, forever, never to pass
Out of its light, tho darkness lay beyond!
Hold me but safe again within the bond
Of one immortal gaze! All woe that was—
Forgotten! All terror that may be—
Defied! No Past is mine; no Future; *look* at me!" "

He held her spellbound with his glance of fire, then, with a sudden quenching of the flame, he let her go. "Yet I must leave you thru all these hours of darkness—I hate the nights that hide you from me!"

¶ She drew a long breath. "Every night has its dawn," she whispered, and the words of hope cheered his heart, as the stars lighten the midnight skies.

It was only a short run into the mountains, the following morning, and Prosperity was lost in wonder as they drove up the winding road to the

"Eyrie," a beautiful cottage, nestling among the crags like a veritable eagle's nest.

She was enraptured by the beauty of it all.

Never before had she seen anything but the low rolling hills about her country home, and she grew almost breathless with awed admiration, of the grandeur before her.

"How close the clouds are! It seems as if I were a free spirit, drawing nearer and nearer Heaven!"

They found only a small party awaiting them at the late luncheon, and the afternoon slipped by, bringing the dinner hour almost before they knew it. "I can't measure time when I am with you," Paul declared, when Beatrice was warned that the dressing bell had rung.

¶ That night there was to be a dance at the Hotel, and Mrs. Fremaine took a ballot, after dinner, which resulted in the majority of her guests voting to attend.

"It is a nuisance to have to 'follow your leader'!" Paul grumbled, as he and Beatrice brought up the rear of the party wending their way down the mountain side towards the hotel, whose many windows glared brilliantly, in garish contrast to the soft silver sheen of the moonlight *so so*

¶ Beatrice assented. "I wish *this* was all of life—God and you!" she breathed, pausing to let her eyes drink in the mystic beauty of the mist veiled mountains. "There seems to be nothing worth while but worship, and love, when nature is like this. The strength and grandeur of the mountains stir into life every noble impulse one's heart has ever felt, and the mysterious solemnity of the shadows, in contrast to the brilliant pools of silver moonbeams, reminds one's soul of the sadness of sin, and the peace of purity!"

Paul sighed: "The 'sadness of sin'—*that* is deeper than any shadow cast by either moonlight or sunshine!"

She turned toward him with an impulse of tenderness, but the light in her face changed to one of quick terror. "Oh look!" she gasped.

¶ Heath followed her startled gaze, but only the swaying and swinging of the disturbed bushes, and the crackling of twigs beneath hastily retreating footsteps, told him what had caused her alarm.

"Probably only a tramp," he reassured her, but she shook her head in response. "I saw the very same *wicked* face watching me at the station, today, and one I *thought* was like it just before we came back to town—it is horrible!"

Paul felt a shock of suspicion. Was Briggs on his track—was he dogging his footsteps—and for what purpose? He had expected him to approach with a renewed demand, and hourly had dreaded his reappearance, after that meeting in the park, but, as the days had slipped by, bringing no sign from him, a sense of respite had come to Heath, and he had dared to hope that Briggs had taken him at his word, and believed that he would risk exposure rather than extortion—once convinced of this, Paul felt sure Briggs would not incriminate himself to work revenge upon another man, and so the victim would escape.

Yet whom could this fellow be whom Beatrice had found watching her? A sudden new, undefined terror gripped him—supposing danger menaced her through him—supposing that incarnate devil aimed a blow at *her*?

He caught his breath; something must be done to stop *that*, at all costs. He turned to her. “Will you marry me, Beatrice, *at once*, so we can go away, together, and *lose ourselves* somewhere in the great world? I can’t wait!”

The others were waiting for them, and she had only time to raise her trustful eyes to his, giving her mute consent, before they were seized upon by Mrs. Fremaine, who insisted that they owed a duty to mankind, and were getting selfish in their mutual absorption.

Consequently they were separated. Paul drifting to the smoking room, and Beatrice putting in two hours of dancing, and perfunctory chit chat, which would have bored her had she not been too happy to feel aught but joy in everything about her.

Nevertheless it was with a sigh of relief that she saw Paul coming toward her, with a look on his face which she knew meant he intended to take possession of his own, once more, and she assented eagerly to his suggestion for a walk thru the lantern lighted gardens.

¶ The place seemed deserted, and they finally settled themselves in a distant nook, shrouded in shrubbery.

Softly the music floated to them across the flowers, steeping the senses in sweetness of melody and perfume, while the tinkle of a fountain’s splash came to them like the laughter of mountain elves reveling in the moonbeams.

Beatrice looked up and caught the new light in Paul’s eyes. “Your promise—you really meant it?” he breathed.

For answer she stole her hand within his, bending her head till her lips touched his fingers. “But when,” he demanded—“Tomorrow?”

¶ Then she laughed; a bubbling of purest joy welling up from her heart of hearts.

“I want it to be tomorrow,” he persisted, longing to be able to tell her of the desperate need for haste, which his fright of that night had raised within him.

But she only laughed again. “Tomorrow we will *talk* about it,” she conceded, “and maybe it can be pretty soon!”

She leaned against him, happy in his nearness, and in the sense of their oneness; all unconscious of the dread gnawing at his heart. Then a breeze, cooled by its flight from the mountain tops, chilled her by its too familiar touch, and Paul, seeing her shiver, insisted on going for her wrap. She listened to his retreating footsteps with a little smile of happy pride in his anxious care of her, but her lips stiffened in sudden terror as she saw the same face which had peered at her from the bushes, now bending above her thru the parting shrubbery at her side.

“Hush—don’t scream—I’m not going to hurt you; I’m an old friend of Heath’s and I want to speak to you!”

At the mention of Paul's name she rose to confront the man, all the woman in her roused to defence by the intuitive perception that harm was intended.

"They say you are to marry him." Briggs hurried on, knowing that his time was short, "but I guess you will think better of that when you know that he isn't fit to—"

She had withdrawn her long gloves, and now she raised them, and deliberately whipped them across his lips!

Rage leaped hot within him, and with an oath he seized her slender wrist in his powerful grip. "You dare!" he foamed, "you dare to insult me, you puppet, when I could wring your little neck with a twist of my thumb! I *would* only that I can make you suffer more by letting you live, and making you know that the man you have bowed your proud heart to is a *forg*er, a *felon*, a cheat, and *these papers prove* the truth of all I—"

The sharp bark of a revolver cut the air, and the rush of words ended in a groan as Briggs, huddled lifeless to the ground.

Beatrice staggered back to meet Paul's eyes as they gazed at her across the prostrate form between them, and a lifetime of despair was lived in that breathless pause. Then the sound of running footsteps wakened her into action.

Stooping, she snatched the packet of papers from the nerveless fingers of the fallen man, and, pressing to Paul's side, caught the still smoking weapon from his hand, just as a crowd of men burst in upon them, halting aghast at the tragic scene.

Paul, rigid and horror stricken, oblivious of everything but the slowly creeping, crimson stream ebbing from the wounded form at his feet, and Beatrice, white as a frozen image of fear, but with eyes like stars, and facing them all like a stag at bay!

"Who did it—who did it?" was the cry, and she answered, clear and cold: "I did it—I!"

Paul started and shuddered as he drew closer to her. "Hush, you don't know what you are saying," he implored, but she raised her right hand which clasped the revolver. "I was alone"—she faltered, "he tried to rob me—Paul came—they fought—he drew out this from his pocket, but Paul knocked it from his hand and I—I picked it up and shot him to save—" Her voice failed, her eyes widened, as if in sudden, convulsive pain, and Paul's arms closed about her.



CHAPTER XVIII

ALL that terrible night he hung over her as she lay unconscious, and scarcely breathing; remorse, grief, love and despair battling in his storm tossed soul.

At last, as the first faint hint of dawn tinted the skies, the awful death like pallor of her face softened to a less pallid whiteness, and a tinge of red crept back into the bluish lips.

Then the doctor turned to Paul. "The shock has been severe, even for a person with a normal heart action. I hope to pull her thru, but not unless she has perfect quiet."

Miserably he returned the coldly professional stare. "You mean I must go—I must stay out of her room?"

The doctor nodded, emphatically, "Your face would be enough to kill her." So, with bowed head, Paul followed Prosperity from the room.

¶ In the hall outside they met Mrs. Fremaine. "I've just heard from that man, he isn't dead, after all, it was only a scalp wound. Now there won't need to be any trouble—if only Beatrice will get well!"

¶ But it was many hours before Beatrice at last opened her eyes, to find her faithful little cousin keeping watch at her side.

Vaguely she looked about her and then, remembering, started up from her pillows with a wild terror in her eyes. "Paul—where is Paul?"

¶ Prosperity bent over her—"He is safe—safe," she soothed.

"But the papers—those papers!"

"They are safe, too," and Prosperity slipped the soiled packet into the shaking fingers stretched out for them. "No one saw them," she reassured. "You had put them inside your bodice, and, when they lifted you, the papers fell out, and I just took them without saying anything to any one, for I felt sure you would not have hid them so if you had wished any one to know of them."

Beatrice drew a deep breath of relief as she sank back, thrusting the letters beneath her pillow as the door opened to admit Mrs. Fremaine.

¶ "You blessed girl, you've got back your wits again all right! Heavens! but you have given us a scare with that stubborn faint!" and the little woman bubbled cheerfully on, striving to banish the tragic gloom in the great dark eyes. Failing in this, she took another course, and, bending over Beatrice, took the wan face between her hands, "Now I'm going to scold a little," she declared, "It *was* an awful shock, and all that, but you weathered it, and the doctor says now you only need rest to make you the same as ever, and that man hasn't gone and died at all, it was only a scalp wound you gave him, so you have no excuse for looking so tragic, and I'm not going to *let* you take

it all so!" She finished, with an affectionate briskness intended to be stimulating.

Her news concerning Briggs brought two red spots to the white cheeks, "Not dead," repeated Beatrice, relief being lost sight of in the dread that Briggs might yet bring Paul to shame, and disgrace. Then her fingers came in contact with the hidden papers, and relief took complete possession, for, without proof, the enemy was harmless. "Oh, thank God—thank God," she whispered.

Delighted, Mrs. Fremaine ran blithely on. "Well, of course, it's a good thing the creature was *not* killed in one way, because then there would have had to be all sorts of enquiries, and no end of trouble with lawyers, and courts, and all that. But still it certainly would have been good riddance to the world at large, and why the silly old law makes so much fuss over the killing of such vipers, as if they were a blessing instead of a menace to the community, passes my understanding, but I suppose that's because, as Mr. Fremaine says, I'm so 'essentially feminine' I can't be expected to see sense in nonsense! But anyhow, now that the beast is not seriously hurt, nothing can be done to *you*, unless you choose to make *him* trouble for attempting to *rob* you, and I don't believe I'd bother about him! He has had a good scare, and the lesson will last him, I guess, for I shouldn't think such gentry would be anxious to leave *this* world when they have so little that's *good* coming to them in the *next*!"

Beatrice shrank, "Oh, no! no! I never want to see him—to hear his name again!" and, at the nervous distress in her look, and tone, Prosperity interfered, gently urging their voluble little hostess from the room.

All that day she kept watch and ward over the invalid, shielding her from the un wisdom of too much affectionate attention, and soothing her with quiet touch, and voice, until the tense, strained look lifted, and a faint color returned to lips and cheeks.

As she bent to kiss her good night, Beatrice drew her face closer, "Little blessed comforter," she whispered, tremulously.

But, long after even the faithful little watcher had fallen asleep, Beatrice's great eyes stared into the darkness, while her straining ears listened to the measured footfall of one pacing sleeplessly, untiringly up and down, up and down, outside her door. And, as she harkened, the healing tears of comfort stole down her cheeks, while her fingers clasped the packet closer to her heart, and her lips formed the words, "God bless *him*—whatever is to be!"



CHAPTER XIX

SEVERAL days passed before Beatrice was able to walk about her room. Paul had spent the time hovering near, but had not dared cross the threshold, nor had she asked to see him.

At last, one morning, as Prosperity sat beside her couch, she looked up and, with a strangely wistful smile, whispered; "Today—*now* I will see him!"

Paul, walking ceaselessly to and fro in the hall outside, like some unhappy ghost forever forbidden rest, instantly obeyed her summons, tho his face, as Prosperity closed the door behind him, leaving him alone with Beatrice, was set like one already stiff in death.

Inside the room two souls met, as souls seldom meet this side the grave. At last Paul's strained voice broke the silence, "You did not *believe* him—what he said of me?"

Without replying, Beatrice crossed the room to the fireside, where a small blaze tempered the freshness of the mountain air. As she stood before it she drew from her bosom the packet of soiled letters, at sight of which Paul started violently, and the veins on his temples stood out like whip-cords.

She turned the package over and over in her hands, then, raising her eyes to his, she said softly, "Once I promised you that, tho the whole world condemned you, *I* would trust you—I have kept my word—I have not read one line of these letters, and I will believe *only* what *you tell* me!"

As she spoke, she dropped the packet into the nest of glowing embers, and, in a silence like that of death, so pregnant was it with meaning, they watched the papers curl and shrivel into a mass of feathery grey.

¶ Then she slowly turned, and their eyes met. Deep lines cut into his face, as if carved there by an unbearable agony, for his soul was fighting its supreme battle against fearful odds. To belie such trust would be the unforgivable sin—yet to tell her the truth would be to rob him forever of what was dearer to him than life, dearer, even, than love—her faith in him!

The conflict raged within him, scarring his face, and, as she read his look, she *knew*.

Slowly, unsteadily, as if weighted with a great weariness which must, henceforth, burden her, she approached him. "It was all true," she said, as if making a statement of facts, not asking for verification.

¶ Dumbly, hopelessly, he returned her gaze. Then, with a little sigh, she leaned her head against his arm like a tired child, and, looking up into his face, said, simply, "I love you!"

Bewildered, unbelieving, he gazed down at her, "You—you don't

understand—you can't know what you are saying," he faltered, but she leaned the closer, clinging to him, while a light, beyond anything ever seen on earth, dawned in her eyes. "Is it so wonderful?" she whispered. "What is a dearer blessing to love than to—*forgive?*"

¶ A sudden trembling seized upon him, like the quivering of a strong oak in a tempest. "O God!" he cried, his voice broken by sobs, as he caught and crushed her to him.

She did not speak, while he, wrestling with the overmastering emotions swaying him, could only falter forth his love, his gratitude, and his wonder, in scarcely audible whispers.

At last, conquering himself, and steadying his voice by a determined effort at self control, he said, "Let me tell you about it all—how it came to be so! Nothing can excuse me, but it will show you the sort of life I was pushed into from the start; how little chance I had! My mother died when I was born, and my father used her small fortune to indulge himself in his passion for gambling, until he died, (when I was about fifteen) leaving me almost penniless, and absolutely friendless, except for the men among whom he had lived—gamblers, and worse! Not knowing what else to do, I consented to Briggs' suggestion that I should live with him, and so fell completely under his influence."

¶ His voice faltered, but the pressure of her hand encouraged him to go on. "Things went from bad to worse with us, for, after my money ran out, we had only the earnings of the table to keep our heads above water. At last I sank so low as to adopt the tricks Briggs taught me, at which game I was caught in Chicago and obliged to leave the city to escape punishment. Then, in a weak moment, the worst of my life, when good was at its lowest ebb in me, I forged a check at the insistent instigation of my evil genius, and, tho he helped to cover up my crime so that I escaped detection, (upon condition that I shared the proceeds with him) he never ceased to hold it over me, forcing me to support him, by fair means or foul, or pay the penalty of that one rash act. So, for years, I was his slave, knowing he had the proof of my crime somewhere in his possession, and therefore not daring to defy him, or break away. At last, he became bitten with the fever of the gold-seeker, and, when he joined the army of men flocking to that greatest gamble of all, I breathed freer, hoping I had seen the end of him. And indeed I had, for many years, during which I heard nothing of him, nor from him, till I began to believe I was forever rid of my tormentor. Then I met you!"

He drew a deep breath, loosing his close clasp about her, and drawing back so that they stood face to face. Steadily she returned his gaze, a smile sad, yet sweet, lying deep in her eyes. "Oh, heart that understands," he whispered low, in passionate response, "you have given me back my soul!"



CHAPTER XX

SOCIETY, amusing itself at the seashore, or mountains, eagerly welcomed this social esclandre.

Beatrice Vandee had never been popular, so there were few friends to shield her name from light usage, and society accordingly tossed it lightly about, as children will play with something which is usually beyond their reach. ¶ There was one, however, who read the papers with feverish interest; whose trembling hands showed it was no mere bagatelle to him; and that person was Reggy King.

Had his plans failed? Had Briggs been silenced before he had spoken? The uncertainty was maddening; despair raged in his heart, each new item of news being devoured with ever increasing anxiety.

Had he dared to do so he would have gone into the mountains in search of his tool, but one false step might ruin all, so he set his teeth, and waited *so so*

¶ In the meantime, Briggs found himself in no less a quandary. His wound healed rapidly, and in a short time he was able to be about again, but utterly at a loss to know how to act. He had done his errand, to be sure, but the girl had refused to believe him, and, to his rage and dismay, he found he had lost the papers which alone placed Heath in his power.

Cautiously he had enquired about them, but none knew of, nor had seen, the packet, and careful search among the grasses of the place where he had fallen proved to be equally unavailing—no trace of the lost papers was to be found.

Fear gripped him lest they had fallen into Heath's possession, and this possibility maddened him. He cursed the luck that had dealt him so slight a wound from his enemy's hand, for he would have welcomed anything which delivered Paul into the power of the law. He would have taken a fiendish delight in being prosecuted for his supposed attack upon Beatrice, which he might have turned into a weapon against Heath, but as no real harm had been done, and as the doctor had forbidden all further mention of the matter before his patient, the whole affair had been quietly dropped, and people began to talk of other things.

Beatrice gained slowly in strength, and one warm, drowsy afternoon was carried out under the trees, to be made comfortable in the easiest of hammocks, amid a nest of soft pillows.

Mrs. Fremaine regarded her with her head on one side, "If I was only an artist I'd paint you, for you look like some mystic goddess with those pink, and blue, and old gold pillows all about you, like the billowy clouds one sees at sunset."

Beatrice smiled in response, but even so short a journey had tired her, and she felt unequal to joining in the chat about her.

So she was left unmolested, to rest, and drink in the grandeur of the mountains surrounding her, till at last, lulled by the humming voices hushed out of consideration for her, and swaying like a bird on the boughs in the breeze-rocked, cradling hammock, she fell into a light slumber, seeing which they all slipped away, leaving Paul to keep guard over her.

Left alone he withdrew to a distant seat and lighted a cigar. From where he sat he could see her pure profile, cut like a cameo against the background of a dark blue silk pillow. A pang of desperate pity, an anguished remorse, swept over him as he noted the fragility of that dear face. The blue shadows beneath the dark lashes sweeping her thin cheek, and the pathetic droop of lips, curved as for a sigh even in sleep. One by one he went over the events of that fateful night when she had taken the blame of his act upon herself, and he shuddered at the thought of what it would have meant to her if his shot had taken Briggs' wretched life, instead of merely a bit of his scalp.

She had possessed herself of the weapon, had been holding it, still smoking, in her hand when they all came rushing upon them, and, with such evidence, could he have made *his* story believed; could he have saved her from the consequences of her self-sacrifice?

He shuddered at the images in his brain.

What misery his love had brought her! Could he ever make up to her for all she had suffered for, and thru, him? Could she ever know any real happiness now, understanding what his past had been, and *remembering*, as she always must? Would it not always come between them? Could even such love as hers *forget* such wrongs?

These questions stung him into restive movement, and he began tramping softly up and down the graveled walk. Suddenly, as he turned at the furthest bend in the path, he came once more face to face with Briggs.

At sight of this man, who had been his ruin, all the devil in him leaped to life. But Briggs was desperate too. "I want my papers!" he snarled. ¶ A flash of triumph lighted Paul's eyes: "*I saw them burn to ashes!*" he exulted.

"You lie!" Briggs savagely caught at his throat with his left hand, while his right sought his hip pocket. "You've got them! Hand over, or *I'll end you!*"

Paul struggled to free himself from the wolfish clutch, then, seeing the glitter of steel, struck up the right hand just as the trigger fell. A blinding flash, and stinging pain in his eyes, mingled with a curse, as Briggs plunged into the thicket; then all grew dark to Paul.

The noise of the shot brought every one running from the house to find Beatrice already at his side, vainly striving to lift him in her arms, and moaning softly to herself, as if in pain too great for utterance.



CHAPTER XXI

SILENCE reigned in the sick room, where Beatrice Vandee's life ebbed slowly away.

In the adjoining room lay Paul, waiting to be summoned to their last meeting. A cloth was laid over his eyes, and a groan escaped his lips, "God! God! to leave me my wretched life to fight thru in blindness and to take all that is dear in it away from me!"

A faint sound in the next room made him start to his feet, listening: "It is her voice," he cried, flinging the bandage from his eyes, and then, realizing his new helplessness, groping his way slowly towards the door.

Beatrice gazed at him as he was led to her bedside, meeting the emptiness in his great eyes with shrinking pain, "Blind—*blind!*" she whispered, with quivering lips.

Paul fell on his knees at her side. "I can't see you," he cried, "Beatrice, Beatrice, I can't see you!"

She drew his face down to hers, and he heard her moan, "O God, I can't leave him alone in the *dark!*" She kissed the sightless eyes, holding him close, as tho defying death to take her from him, while his hard drawn breath was the only sound that broke the stillness. Then, like the dawn of some wondrous day, a light flooded her whole being, irradiating her face, and scattering the pain and dread as night disappears before the sun.

He could not see, but he felt the change, and lifted his head as if listening to some unseen voice; then he heard her saying—"Yes, I understand, now, and I am glad!"

With a sudden strength she raised herself until she rested on his breast. "I am going home," she whispered, "just going before to help show *you* the *way!* You will follow me, and find God!"

He snatched her to him, "No! no! you shall not go—you must not leave me all alone, and blind, blind, blind!"

Her breath grew fainter, "He maketh the blind to *see,*" she breathed, and a luminous smile glorified her face, as her spirit sped upwards in its homeward flight.

A frenzy of terror seized Paul, "Beatrice, Beatrice speak to me! Just once more—speak to me, speak to me!"

But Prosperity's sobs were his only answer.



CHAPTER XXII

THE world had grown ten years older since Beatrice Vandee died, and society had forgotten her, and the tragedy of her life, but in the sweet country there was a grave that showed she was remembered, for a fresh bunch of flowers was placed on the mound every evening, just as the sun sank in the western sky, thru winter's chill, and summer's heat.

¶ It had been a warm day for September and the heat had wilted the blossoms till they drooped and mingled with the grasses.

The setting sun was giving them a last hot, good-night kiss, as a little child appeared, winding her way among the grave-stones, and leading by the hand a tall, dark man, who walked with the trained hesitancy of the blind.

"O, they are almost withered," she cried, her clear, childish treble vibrating on the still air, and taking the fresh flowers from her companion's hand she replaced the withered ones on the grave.

"I put extra pretty ones in, tonight, because mother says it's the anniversary of the day she first saw cousin Beatrice, before they grew up, and long before she went to visit her in New York, I mean, and the sunshine makes the roses look so red and bright, just as if they were happy to be there!"

Paul smiled softly, "Happy to be there," he repeated, "To serve her, in any way—that would be happiness!"

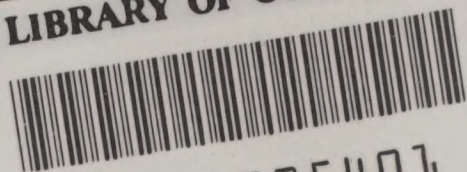
The child's large eyes read his face with a comprehending gaze. "You loved her very, very much, didn't you, cousin Paul?"

"I love her more every day, every hour!"

She pressed closer to him in understanding sympathy, but he went on, dreamily, as tho forgetful of her presence: "Dear, you were right—'*He maketh the blind to see,*' so, in my darkness, it has been made clear to me that 'tis only the things of the spirit which endure—only when love becomes spiritualized that it becomes eternal. But Oh! immutable and mysterious law, thru which innocence suffers for the guilty, and purity pays the price of sin!"

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